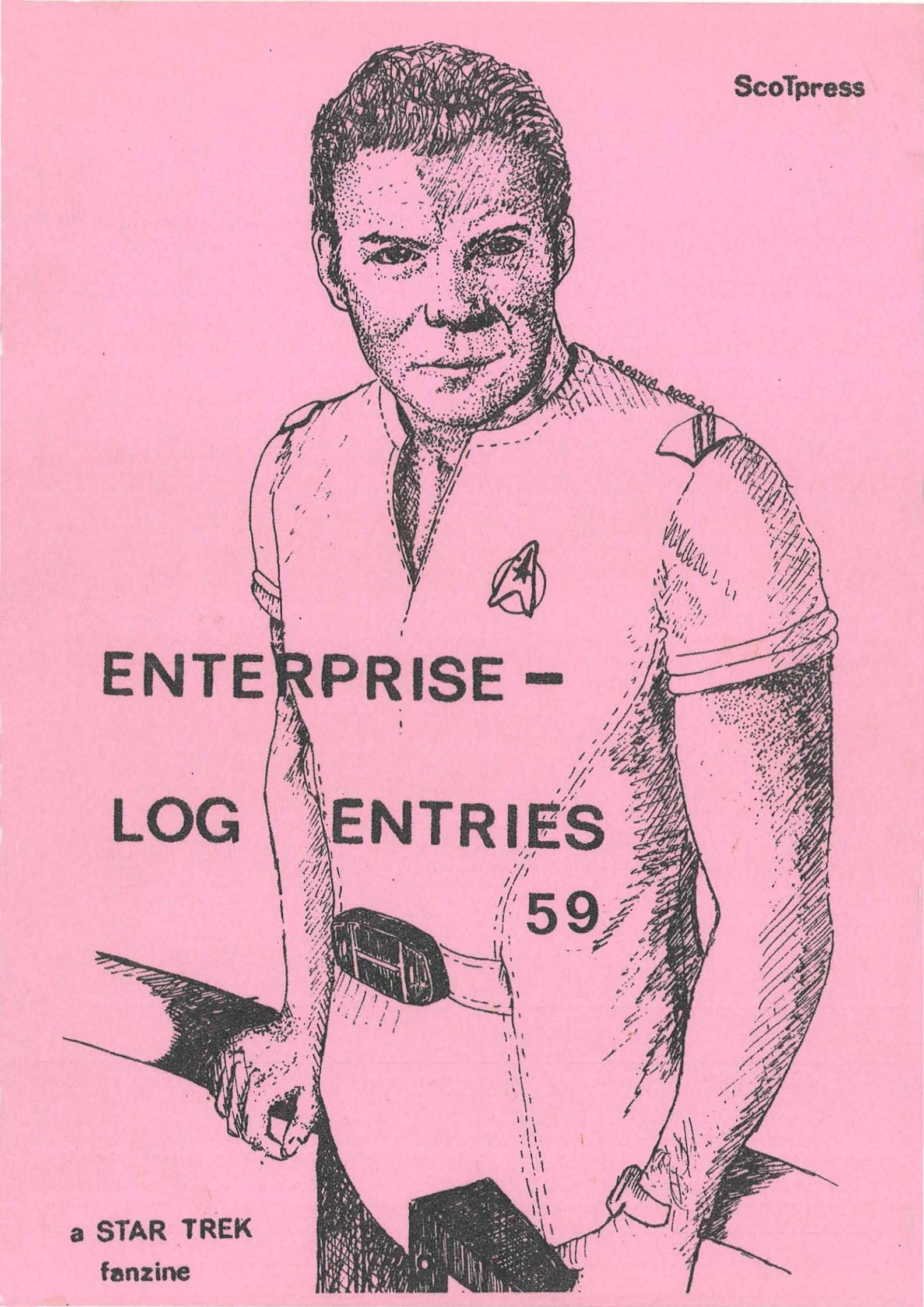


ScoTpress



ENTERPRISE -

LOG ENTRIES

59

a STAR TREK  
fanzine

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December, 1983.

Scotpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona.

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 59.

Even before getting over losing Lorraine, the Chain Gang has suffered another loss. Cory Kings has left us for another job based in Hampshire. We wish her every success in her new job, and would like to thank her very much for all the work she has done for us. Since she is even further away than Lorraine, we don't expect to see her except at Cons - so make sure you're there, Cory!

A lot of you have been sending used stamps with your orders; we would like to thank everyone who has done this. We will be handing in another hundredweight of stamps to the Guide Dogs in the very near future. If everyone sends in a few stamps it's amazing how it mounts up, and a very worthwhile charity benefits. If you have a big bundle to send, you can send them direct to Molly MacLeod, 15 Letter Daill, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll; but if you prefer to send them to Sheila, by all means do so.

Although we have not put out a specifically Christmas issue, we do have two seasonal stories for you. We would like to thank all our contributors over the past year, and would like to wish them and you all the best for the coming year.

Karen

— Q —

Janet Shona



## THE SOLIPSIST MACHINE

by

Lynette Muir

"Captain's Log, Stardate 6124.7. In response to a Priority One order from Starfleet Command, we are transporting Mr. Spock to the Historical Research Centre on the planetoid Clio."

They materialised in a grassy open space in the centre of a large quadrangle of buildings. Facing them was a two-storey house with mullioned windows of old Tudor Earth style, while the wings to right and left were formed respectively of a pillared Grecian temple in golden stone, and a white steel and concrete office block of the twentieth century.

"Where on earth are we, Spock?" Kirk turned to look behind him and found that the fourth side of the courtyard was grey stone Gothic with high pointed arches and a line of gargoyle along the edge of the steeply-sloping roof.

"We would appear to be in the Terran College of Historical Research, Captain," was the calm reply. Spock looked round and added, "The European section, to judge by the architecture."

Before Kirk could say anything else a young man in a sweater and jeans came hurrying up to them.

"Mr. Spock?" he asked, addressing himself exclusively to the Vulcan and ignoring his companion.

"Affirmative."

"Thank goodness you've arrived at last. Professor Gnoskein is getting so impatient. Not that one can blame him, of course; this is the biggest breakthrough..."

The excited young man was leading them as he talked towards a heavy iron studded door in the Tudor wing. He stopped suddenly and looked at Spock.

"We were told you were a Vulcan/Human hybrid," he said almost accusingly.

Kirk stiffened and glared angrily at the tactless statement. Spock, however, apparently recognised the inquiry as being a simple desire for confirmation of a necessary datum.

"That is correct," he concurred. "My mother is Human."

The young man surveyed the impassive face, taking in the totally Vulcan features and colouring. "Fascinating." He walked on quickly, and Kirk followed, trying hard not to laugh at Spock's almost nonplussed expression. It was rare for the Vulcan to have his favourite adjective used against him.

They reached the door, which bore an incongruous modern notice: TOP SECRET - AUTHORISED PERSONNEL ONLY. Their cicerone pulled the old-fashioned iron bell handle. As they waited for the door to open, he suddenly seemed to notice Kirk for the first time.

"I'm afraid this is top security," he said. "General researchers aren't allowed, Mr....?"

"Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise," was the acid reply. "As a Starfleet Captain I have top security clearance in all parts of the Federation." He expected some reaction, but hardly the one he got.

"That's all right, then," said their guide cheerfully. And he ushered Spock in through the now open door with Captain James T. Kirk meekly trailing behind.

But as they crossed the great hall, timbered in the ancient style and with a glowing log fire apparently blazing under the stone, canopied overmantle, the First Officer automatically dropped back and took up his usual position a couple of paces behind his Captain, so when the young man thumbed open a door and without

looking behind him led them into a laboratory announcing, "Mr. Spock, Professor," it was not surprising that the short white-haired man in grey coveralls should rush forward and grasp Kirk's hands eagerly, with a quick, "Thank you, Doulos" to his assistant.

The professor's next actions were more unexpected, however, for without giving anyone a chance to speak he hustled the Captain over to a large chair which was placed at one side of the great console which dominated the room.

"If you would just sit down there, I can adjust the circuit integrators," he babbled, hastily clamping a series of electrodes onto Kirk's arms and neck. "Now the helmet, so. No, a bit higher, I think. It is most important for you to be completely relaxed and comfortable."

"Professor Gnoskein!" The perfectly timed duet of baritone and light tenor as Kirk and Doulos addressed him simultaneously would have delighted a conductor, but made no impact at all on the excited little man as with swift precise movements he adjusted dials on the arms of the chair which reminded Kirk unpleasantly of the so-called rehabilitation chair in which he had been tortured on Elba II. It seemed highly unlikely that Professor Gnoskein had any malevolent intentions, but he was remarkably difficult to make contact with.

"Professor Gnoskein, this is not..." Doulos was still trying to interrupt the proceedings with no success as the helmet which looked like a cross between an ancient phrenometer and the Teacher used on Sigma Draconis was now being lowered onto the Captain's unwilling but immobilised head. It was obvious that drastic measures were called for.

"PROFESSOR GNOSKEIN!" Any member of the Enterprise crew would have recognised the tone and most of them would have claimed it would stop a Rigellian berserker. It did at least penetrate the scientist's abstraction.

"Yes, yes, what is it?" He paused a moment and looked impatiently at the gold-shirted figure in the chair.

"I am not Spock!" Kirk kept enough edge on his voice to ensure the professor understood.

"Not Mr. Spock? Then why are you here? Doulos, you said Mr. Spock was here. Why have you allowed this person to come and interrupt my work? Where is Mr. Spock?"

Kirk also would have liked the answer to that last question, but first things first. "Let me out of this contraption, Professor, and tell me what's happening!" he barked. "Here, you, Doulos or whatever your name is, get these damn wires off me or I'll break them."

As Doulos hastened to obey, Spock strolled into view round the corner of the console which he had been investigating, looking as calm as if nothing untoward was happening.

"There you are, Spock. What have you been doing?"

An eyebrow reacted to the almost petulant tone. "I have been looking round, Captain," was the patient reply

Fuming at the whole silly incident, Kirk did not stop to question this very uncharacteristic behaviour, but cast a baleful glance at his unperturbed First Officer, and another at the professor, who with Doulos's help had now removed the helmet and was resetting dials with total absorption. As the last link between him and the chair was severed, Kirk scrambled out with rather more haste than dignity, and turned to Gnoskein.

"Now, Professor Gnoskein, if you will explain what this is all about, Mr. Spock will be able to tell you whether he wishes to take part in whatever experiment you are now contemplating." The tone suggested that Kirk thought such a desire on the Vulcan's part was in the highest degree improbable.

Gnoskein turned from his dials and smiled suddenly. "I must apologise, sir.

In my enthusiasm I forgot you did not know, could not know, what an opportunity awaits you."

Unable to remain angry for long in the face of the smile and the apology, Kirk smiled back and pointed to his First Officer. "Not me," he said firmly. "This is Mr. Spock."

"Oh yes, of course, how foolish. You aren't a Vulcan. You can't be Spock. But you, sir..." he turned a bewildered look on the quietly waiting Spock, "you can't be Human, you are all Vulcan."

"I am half Human by birth, Professor. But my physical and mental make-up are 84.7% Vulcan. What is it you wish me to do?"

"Ah! Perhaps that will work. You see, it's the Solipsist Machine. I call it that. Watch." Gnoskein turned a knob and a viewscreen in front of the chair pulsed into life. "This is the gateway to history."

Another switch started a flickering series of pictures which were sickeningly familiar. Kirk felt an icy hand grip his heart as he watched Human history pass before him as it had done on the occasion of the ill-fated journey into the past through the Guardian of Forever.

"Most interesting, Professor." The quiet Vulcan voice hardly penetrated the Captain's abstraction. "You have succeeded in making a model of the Guardian of Forever?"

"No, no, much more than that!" The professor pushed back his flowing white hair with what was obviously an automatic gesture. "I have not made a model, I have made a completely new breakthrough. Tell me, sir, what is the greatest handicap in reconstructing the processes of thought governing the development of historical events?" Without giving anyone the chance to answer the question even if they had felt so inclined, Gnoskein hurried on, his eyes blazing with enthusiasm. "It is not knowing why people make decisions. What were their actual thoughts at the moment of acting?"

"That is certainly a difficulty," conceded the Vulcan.

Kirk said nothing, lost in a maelstrom of memories: "Do you know what you just did, Jim?"/"He knows, Doctor, he knows."

The words echoed through his head over and over again. Not know the reason for acting? No, people did not know why others acted the way they did. The way they had to do. I could have saved her. I should have saved her somehow. Kirk forced his attention back to Gnoskein, who was now explaining his machine to the Vulcan.

"So you see," he said triumphantly, "by choosing the person and the moment in time you can project your own mind into their mind and actually know why they made their decision. Experience their emotion. Be that person in that moment. And with no risk of changing history!"

As the words sank in Kirk turned a horrified look at the scientist. "Are you saying, Professor, that you can actually enter someone's mind with that machine? Eavesdrop on their thoughts?"

"Yes, yes, yes! How many times do I have to explain it to you?"

"And what happens to the body of this... voyeur?" The icy voice obviously surprised Gnoskein.

"Voyeur? What nonsense are you talking, sir?"

"You don't call spying on someone's private feelings voyeurism?" In his anger Kirk ignored the fact that Doulos had crossed to the intercom and was talking urgently into it.

"But these people are all dead, long ago. It is no different from digging up ruins or opening graves or coffins. How can we learn about the past without investigating such things?" Gnoskein was genuinely puzzled.

Spock was silent. His blank face irritated Kirk. How could the Vulcan listen without objection to this obscene suggestion? For that's what it was. Obscene! Worse than a peeping-tom. Kirk had seen too many strange techniques to question the possibility that the professor's machine could do what he claimed for it. As he remembered some of his recent experiences, his guts twisted with revulsion. He had barely come to terms, even now, with the consequences of the life-entity transfer of Camus II. Not only the shock of finding himself in the body of a woman. That had been traumatic enough, but the real horror had been knowing that someone else had been using his body! He clenched his fists at the memory of the sharply-pointed nails he had clipped down almost to the quick, the endless showers as he tried to scour away the sense of dirt, or revulsion, of wearing clothes someone else had soiled, contaminated.

And this white-haired benign-looking Frankenstein fussing over his monstrous machine was proposing to invade the mind - not just the body but the mind - of anyone he chose! No, worse than that; was apparently suggesting that Spock should do it! A Vulcan raping an unknown mind. A whole series of unwilling minds! Kirk controlled his raging disgust and kept his voice level.

"Mr. Spock cannot possibly agree with your proposal, Professor. Come on, Spock, we'll get back to the ship."

"Your presence here is neither necessary nor welcome, Captain. Do not let us keep you."

The soft voice made Kirk spin round in surprise. Lost in his unpleasant reverie he had not noticed the newcomer's arrival. "Who are you?" he snapped.

The brusque tone shocked Doulous. "Dr. Scaytot is the Director of the Terran Historical Research Section." The reproof in the assistant's voice did nothing to improve Kirk's temper.

"You are aware of the nature of Professor Gnoskein's research?"

Scaytot gazed blandly at the irate Starfleet officer. "Of course. But I am totally unable to comprehend what business it is of yours, Captain. Starfleet has agreed to Mr. Spock's being seconded to this station for a period of time to assist Professor Gnoskein in perfecting this great achievement. I presume you do not intend questioning Starfleet's orders in this matter?"

Kirk glared at the plump, pasty face. Control, James, control. He's got you checked there. But there are more moves than one in this game. He doesn't know Spock as you do.

"What is the peculiar virtue of Mr. Spock that makes him a suitable guinea-pig in this... experiment?" He turned to address the remark to Gnoskein, to get away from the sight of the smugly-smiling Scaytot and also to bring Spock into his line of vision. The Vulcan had said very little since they entered the lab - not that he was ever loquacious unless directly questioned.

The professor was apparently oblivious of the fencing between the Captain and the Director. He had Spock ensconced in the big chair and was adjusting the helmet over the sleek dark head.

"There, I think that's about right." He stepped back and checked a dial. "What did you say? Why Mr. Spock? It's simple, Mr. whatever-your-name-is. You see this solipsist machine? I call it that because it's really the opposite. It makes it possible to see the world not only through your own eyes as the philosophers assert, but through another's. But to test it I must have someone who has control of his own reactions and can distinguish between what he feels and what the host-subject is feeling. You see that?" Gnoskein paused to give his audience the chance to ask questions, then continued in the didactic manner of the lecturer.

"For example. If we want to learn why Napoleon made up his mind to march on Moscow, we no longer have to weigh up the evidence of other men's comments and reports, and have a mere deduction as the best answer. No, we simply programme the display - which is of course developed from research done at the historical

centre of the Guardian of Forever, though Mr. Spock's recent paper on the working of the Atavachron suggested some significant modifications to the hardware, which is another reason why he should have the honour of being the first to try the experiment - as I was saying, we programme the display to the correct date and place, bring Napoleon into focus, and then link up the Mind-Coordinator," he pointed to the helmet which now partially hid the silent Vulcan's face, "and through the circuit transfer Mr. Spock can enter the actual mind of the host, Napoleon, and know exactly what were his reasons for the decision."

The professor paused again but still no-one spoke. Doulos and Scaytot were gazing respectfully at the inventor, and Kirk was struggling to comprehend the full significance of what he had heard. If the machine could really do all that Gnoskein claimed, it was far worse even than he had imagined. No-one would be safe from the probing mind. At any moment in time, past, present or future, a man's innermost feelings would be laid bare before the officious, prying investigators. His fists balled, and Kirk took an involuntary step towards the proud parent of this... succubus!

"It is indeed a great discovery and will be of inestimable value to historians everywhere." The unctuous voice of the Director broke the silence. Looking at the muffin face and dark greedy eyes, Kirk knew that here was a man who would relish the chance to rummage around in other people's minds. He made one more attempt to get through to Gnoskein.

"If this is so important to historians, Professor, why don't you try the machine yourself?" How he kept his voice even he never knew, but somehow the words came out in a fairly normal tone. At least, the professor seemed unaware of the contempt and anger seething behind the innocuous sounding question.

"I can't do two things at once!" he retorted testily. "Someone has to manipulate the controls and no-one else knows how to do that. So of course I can't be in the chair as well. And for this first series of experiments, as I said, it is important that I can trust Mr. Spock's evaluations. His Human half will enable him to coordinate with the subject's mind while his Vulcan half keeps his personal reactions separate. That way there is no contamination. Eventually, of course, I shall complete the programming so that this dichotomy can be achieved by any user of the machine."

"Then without Spock you cannot test this monster of yours? Good." Kirk marched round to the front of the chair and confronted the Vulcan. "Spock, I am ordering you not to cooperate in this experiment. Indeed, I'm surprised and deeply concerned that you've allowed yourself to go so far with it. The whole set-up is grossly unethical by any standards, let alone Vulcan ones. Or does your vaunted respect for the privacy of minds not extend to dead Humans when your scientific curiosity is aroused?"

"Captain, that is enough," Scaytot interrupted sharply. "You have no right to insult the professor. Or even to be here. As for Mr. Spock, he is quite able to decide for himself whether he wishes to cooperate in something that Starfleet has asked him to do." Ignoring the fuming Captain the Director now addressed the still silent Vulcan. "Well, Mr. Spock, you have heard what Professor Gnoskein proposes. Do you wish to help him perfect this outstanding invention?"

"Am I to understand, Professor, that no-one else knows of this machine?" The Vulcan's voice was calm and controlled as always, but with an undercurrent of... excitement? Kirk looked at him incredulously as Scaytot took it upon himself to answer for the professor.

"Quite true. The whole project is of course top secret. Only the people here present at this moment know of its existence and the technical and mathematical software is known only to the professor."

"Indeed." The deep voice might have been acknowledging the information that it was a fine day. "Then, with your permission, Captain, I would like to stay here and assist the professor in testing his remarkable invention."

"Since Starfleet has authorised the scheme," Scaytot broke in quickly before Kirk could answer, "the Captain's permission is hardly relevant."

For the first time since they had entered the lab, Spock looked directly at Kirk, the dark tranquil eyes meeting the angry hazel ones unflinchingly. He raised an interrogative eyebrow, but Kirk was too busy fighting down his anger at what seemed to be the depths of the Vulcan's betrayal to see it.

"As Director Scaytot has pointed out, Commander, my permission is not needed." His tone was glacial. "I am going back to the ship, and it is my sincere hope that I shall not have to see any one of you, ever again."

As the door shut behind the stiffly disapproving figure, Professor Gnoskein turned to the Vulcan. "Now, Mr. Spock, what period and person do you suggest that we start on?"

\* \* \*

The Enterprise was three days out from Clio on a routine haul to deliver supplies and run medical checks on the scientists on Baal III when the call came through from Starfleet.

Uhura swung round and glanced almost apprehensively at the back of the Captain's head. Whatever had happened on Clio - and the ship's grapevine was weighed down with rich, ripe rumours - it had certainly left their commanding officer like a gurath with a very sore head. Thanking her lucky stars that it was nearly the end of watch, the Communications Officer went into her standard routine.

"Priority call from Starfleet coming in, Captain. Admiral Fitzgerald."

"On audio, Lieutenant." The voice was flat and uninterested.

"Switching over now, Captain."

The familiar voice was slightly distorted by distance. "You will abort your current mission, Kirk, and proceed at once to Gametis to pick up High Commissioner Ferris and transport him as quickly as possible to the planetoid Clio. Fitzgerald, Starfleet, out."

If the Bridge had been quiet before it was like a tomb now. Everyone remembered the argument between Fitzgerald and Spock over the Gideon affair. Chekov kept his eyes glued to his gooseneck viewer at the Science station; Sulu gazed straight ahead at the viewscreen; and Uhura mechanically killed the input and restored her console to neutral. The silence stretched out from the motionless figure in the command chair in pulsating waves of tension as the Admiral's words vibrated in the atmosphere.

At last Kirk stirred, stood up and moved towards the door. Then he paused. "Lay in a course for Gametis, Mr. Sulu. Warp six. Notify me of the ETA in my quarters. You have the con." It might as well have been a computer speaking for all the emotion in the voice. Or a Vulcan. Then the turbolift doors closed behind the departing Captain.

\* \* \*

"What's Ferris doing on Gametis?" It was McCoy's third attempt to get some sort of a remark out of the Captain since they set off for the transporter room to receive the Commissioner as protocol demanded. Not, of course, that the doctor's presence was demanded, but McCoy had long established his own Enterprise protocol for being wherever he chose when he chose. As witness his frequent extra-regulation appearances on the Bridge.

This time he almost wished that Kirk would object to his tagging along. Anything would be better than the brooding apathy of the past three and a half days, or so McCoy had thought until he saw the tight-strung concern that had developed in the hours since the message from Starfleet had sent them to this out-of-the-way planet to collect Ferris and take him, of all unlikely places, to Clio.

It was fortunate that the question about Ferris's activities had been merely a ploy to break Kirk out of his self-absorption, for McCoy never got an answer to it, but found himself in the transporter room watching Ferris shimmer into sight knowing nothing of what the Commisssioner had been doing in the two, nearly three years since the Galileo fiasco on Taurus IV.

The doctor had heard plenty, after their miraculous rescue, about the tactless overbearing fussing of the Commissioner as Kirk frantically searched the planet's surface, foot by foot, inch by inch till the last possible moment for his lost crew and shuttle. If the errand to Clio in some way concerned Spock, and the tension in Kirk's manner made it very probable to McCoy's mind, then Ferris was the last man McCoy would have chosen to have on board in the circumstances.

The High Commissioner stepped of the transporter plaetform and acknowledged the Captain's formal greeting. His next words confirmed that the doctor's fears were only too well founded.

"So that Vulcan of yours is in trouble again, Captain."

"Are you referring to Commander Spock, Commissioner?" Kirk's voice was icily calm, and only McCoy, standing just behind, could see the tension in the neck and shoulder muscles as he held himself under desperate control.

"Yes, of course. Didn't they tell you?" Ferris's voice was almost jovial. Had the man no sensitivity?

McCoy glanced apprehensively at Chief Kyle, who stood impassively at attention by the transporter console. McCoy knew that Kyle could be discreet, but Ferris didn't, and to discuss the First Officer in this way was an atrocious breach of discipline, not to mention good manners. But it seemed that Ferris, that stickler for correct behaviour in others, had no qualms about discussing delicate matters in front of junior officers, for as he turned to lead the way out of the room he proceeded to expatiiate on his forthcoming task in a tone that was clearly audible to any passing crewman.

"Well, it seems this professor in some way offended your Vulcan's susceptibilities and got knocked out for his pains." Ferris smiled at the expression of total astonishment on the Captain's formally impassive face. "Yes, it's quite true," he assured his appalled and unwilling audience. "Spock assaulted the professor and is under arrest on Clio. I have been instructed to institute an enquiry into the incident and advise on the precise form of the charges to be brought against your First Officer at the subsequent judicial proceedings."

\* \* \*

By the time the Enterprise went into parking orbit around Clio three days later, Commissioner Ferris had re-established his position as the most unpopular bureaucrat ever encountered by the Enterprise crew, ousting the previous holder of this dubious honour, High Advisor Flasus of Ardana, with consummate ease and a display of smug condescension which rendered even McCoy (almost) speechless.

Kirk had endured the continuous innuendo and needling about so-called Vulcan impassivity in a stoic silence that was so uncharacteristic it had McCoy on tenterhooks waiting for the explosion. But nothing happened till Ferris suggested he alone should beam down to Clio.

"I can see no reason for your participation in this matter, Captain." He smiled patronisingly. "I'm sure it was not Starfleet's intention to divert the Enterprise from her essential task of taking supplies to Baal III for longer than necessary. No doubt appropriate transportation will be arranged for me when I have notified the Federation Council of my findings and recommendations."

The Captain paused by the transporter console to check the coordinates. "I am well aware of your responsibilities in this matter, Commissioner." Kirk's voice was deadly quiet. "I think, however, you forget that I also have a responsibility - to my crew. Commander Spock is my First Officer. He is also my friend. In both capacities he has a right to my presence and my concern in this matter. Is that clear, Commissioner Ferris?" The last words flashed out like a

phaser blast and achieved a satisfactorily stunning effect on the complacent Commissioner, who made his way silently onto the platform.

"Beam us down to the coordinates we used the last time, Mr. Kyle." Without more ado Kirk took up his usual place on the front pad of the transporter. "Energise."

Kyle moved the levers and watched them shimmer out of sight, then gleefully summoned a relief to the transporter room and went off to tell McCoy of the Captain's signal victory.

\* \* \*

Director Scaytot met them at the beam-down point, fawning over the Commissioner and ignoring Kirk, so that for the second time in little more than a week the Captain found himself trailing behind the others as they made their way across the courtyard. On this occasion, however, he was feeling far from meek.

Ferris looked with some surprise and a good deal of approval at the great Tudor hall. "An impressive reconstruction, Director." He smiled graciously down and the pasty-faced little man at his side. "Your research centre is to be congratulated on its verisimilitude."

"Accuracy of detail is of the very essence in matters of historical research, Commissioner." Scaytot smiled back ingratiatingly.

Kirk tried to quell his nausea by deciding which was the more repellent, Scaytot's smiling syncophancy or Ferris's patronising pomposity.

The question was still unresolved when Ferris moved over to a table at one side of the hall, obviously placed ready for the enquiry. Only two chairs were set behind it so Kirk neatly took possession of the second one before Scaytot realised that he was doing.

The Director glared at the Captain. "I was not aware that you would be present at this enquiry, Captain," he snarled.

"Indeed?" was all the reply he was vouchsafed as Kirk settled himself with the air of a man who would not be easily displaced.

Since Ferris made no move to eject the Captain, Scaytot accepted defeat for the moment, pressed a button on the wall, and then drew up another chair for himself and sat down.

"I have given instructions for the prisoner to be brought across, Commissioner. It will take a few minutes as the cells are on the other side of the next quadrangle."

"Cells?" Kirk could not keep the surprise out of his voice, but Scaytot addressed his answer to Ferris as usual.

"We have no real facilities here for dealing with crime, Commissioner, so we had to do the best we could. There are cells in D block belonging to various periods of history, and the Vulcan has been confined in one of them."

"I am quite sure you acted quite properly, Director." Ferris was still gracious, but a tinge of doubt in his voice suggested that he was not quite certain of the propriety of using historical jails for modern prisoners.

They sat in silence for several minutes till footsteps were heard along the corridor at the other side from the labs Kirk had previously visited, and three people entered: Doulos; a tall thin man in overalls who was obviously an attendant of some kind; and Spock.

The Vulcan walked calmly between his Human guards, but Kirk was immediately struck by an indefinable and uncharacteristic air of untidiness about the normally immaculate First Officer. His hair was very slightly disordered, there was a patch of what looked like dust on the neck of his wrinkled uniform shirt, and he appeared even more round-shouldered than usual. Then Kirk realised why. Spock was wearing handcuffs.

"What the devil!" Kirk turned furiously on Scaytot, but Ferris was even quicker and Kirk was content to let him act since it was obvious the Commissioner was genuinely shocked at this breach of regulations.

"Director, it is contrary to the Federation Code of Practice, section 495g, for a prisoner to wear restraints!"

Scaytot bridled angrily. "What do you expect, Commissioner? He is a Vulcan and they are much stronger than any Humans. And he has already attacked one of my researchers. I had to take precautions to protect my people."

"Nonetheless, it is improper." Ferris was adamant. "Remove the handcuffs, which I presume are more of your museum exhibits, immediately."

Reluctantly Scaytot signalled to Doulos, who took an elderly key from his pocket and with equal reluctance unfastened the cuffs and pulled them, none too gently, off the Vulcan's wrists. Spock straightened his tunic with an automatic gesture and took up his usual stance, hands behind his back and face impassive.

Ferris surveyed the silent immobile figure sternly. "Commander Spock," he began severely, "you are charged with assaulting Professor Gnoskein. How do you plead?"

"Guilty, sir."

"Have you anything to say in defence of your actions?"

"No, sir."

Kirk wanted to shake the obstinate Vulcan. If he went on like this he would be cashiered before they even knew what had happened. Suddenly Kirk remembered the previous occasion when Spock had been court martialled. There was something he must do... Yes, that was it. Spock had trapped Commodore Stone into asking him why. Then the whole story had to be brought out in the evidence. Kirk took a deep breath and made his voice as casual as possible.

"May I ask a question, Commissioner?"

Ferris shrugged. "If you wish, Captain."

Kirk looked straight at the Vulcan, willing him to respond. "You are a Vulcan, Mr. Spock," he began, surreptitiously crossing his fingers, "and as such your actions are governed by logic. Will you explain to the court the reason, the logical reason, for your attack on Professor Gnoskein?"

Spock appeared not to hear the question. Desperately, Kirk tried another tack. "Did you use a neck pinch on the Professor?"

"No, sir." Spock seemed almost relieved at being asked a question he could answer.

Kirk was now sure there was more to the problem than had appeared, but how to get it out of Spock? "Since you will not give your reason for attacking the professor," he urged, "will you inform the court of the exact nature of the assault?"

"I held his arm and touched his face."

The curt reply was the signal for a new outburst from Scaytot. "This is ridiculous!" he shouted. "Commissioner, that is a blatant lie! Professor Gnoskein was found unconscious and has been in a coma ever since. And this... this alien says he touched his face! Nonsense!"

Ferris nodded slowly. "It is obvious that there must be more to it than that," he agreed. "What else did you do? I insist on an answer."

To Kirk's dismay the Vulcan was now clearly uneasy but he controlled himself rapidly and answered with almost his usual calm.

"I held the professor against the wall and enforced a mind touch," he said quietly.

A doorway loomed ahead and Kirk mechanically pushed the heavy latch which gave way reluctantly, admitting him to a large dimly-lit building whose soaring arches carried the eye upwards to where glowing figures in red and blue and gold floated against the darkness. A stone bench was set against the wall to the right of the door and Kirk wandered towards it and sat down, leaning his aching head against the cool stone and letting his mind drift as the tension slowly seeped out of his muscles.

Although Ferris had adjourned the enquiry, Kirk had remained on Clio trying to come to terms with the revelation of his First Officer's incredible behaviour. To enforce the mind touch was unthinkable for a Vulcan. Had Spock run mad? What had that damned machine done to him? The scene in Gnoskein's lab played and replayed itself in Kirk's head like an endless loop of tape. Time passed unnoticed as his eyes wandered idly over the golden stars on the dull blue pillars and the grotesque faces picked out in red and white on the capitals carved a thousand years ago by men whose minds also soared beyond the Earth they walked on.

"Excuse me, sir. I wonder if you could tell me the time?" The gentle voice broke into his reverie and jarred him back to the present. An elderly Human with scanty grey hair and a scholar's stoop was looking at him apologetically. "I do beg your pardon, sir. I fear I have woken you up. That was not my intention. Most inconsiderate."

Kirk smiled at him and looked at his wrist chronometer. "It is 15.44 p.s.t.," he said quietly, and then blinked in surprise when his interlocuter pulled a large antique turnip watch out of the pocket of his very modern coveralls and shook it dejectedly.

"Seventeen minutes slow again. Oh dear, I shall be late for tea." He bustled off, muttering to himself in a way that reminded Kirk irresistably of the White Rabbit.

Kirk got up and paced restlessly across the nave, wishing they were back on the Shore Leave planet with the Keeper turning up like the Good Fairy to put everything right. But there was no Keeper and no Good Fairy to explain to him what the devil had caused Spock to act in this strange way. It took a Vulcan to know what a Vulcan was thinking, and the only Vulcan around wasn't giving anything away. Kirk stopped abruptly and snapped his fingers. Fool that he was! This was a Federation centre, not just a Terran one. There must be a Vulcan research staff somewhere and perhaps one of them could help.

Considerably cheered by the possibility of some positive action he turned and strode out of the great Gothic cathedral; barely noticing the intricately carved door-casing in his eagerness. No-one was in sight except the White Rabbit who was trotting briskly across the far side of the court towards the Grecian Temple. Kirk broke into a run, cutting across the grass in the middle of the quadrangle.

"Hi, you sir!" His cry, though loud, went unanswered so he put on a final burst of speed and managed to get near enough to his quarry to attract his attention rather breathlessly. "Excuse me, but can you tell me where the Vulcan research centre is?"

The White Rabbit blinked abstractedly at him, then his face cleared. "It's the gentleman with the accurate watch. Of course. I beg your pardon, sir. What was it you wanted to know?"

"The Vulcan research centre - which way?"

"Vulcan... Let me think a minute." He paused. "Yes, that's the large white building beyond the Pacific. Ummm. Follow this pathway round the corner of the Parthenon then turn left at the Pyramids and right at the Taj Mahal. You can't miss it."

In a more light-hearted mood Kirk would have enjoyed preparing a tale of woe for McCoy on the difficulties of a ship's Captain used to steering by the stars and suddenly despatched on this very specialised kind of monumental point-to-point but he was too worried to do more than heave a sigh of thanks when at last,

having duly turned left at the Pyramids and then confused the Kremlin with the Taj Mahal which led him the wrong way round the Asian Quarter and along the Great Wall of China, he came in sight of a long white building identifiable as the Vulcan Centre by the mosaic IDIC set over the doorway.

The door opened automaticall at his approach and he found himself in a tiled hall facing a large control panel whose buttons were labelled in both Vulcan and Standard Galactic. After looking round in vain for an information booth or receptionist, he realised finally that the board was itself the Information Service. Administering himself a sharp mental kick for being slow on the uptake, he studied the console for a moment and then firmly pushed the button marked Director. It lit up immediately, which was gratifying, and even more satisfactory was the appearance on a small viewscreen of a schematic of the research complex and a route marked in yellow arrows leading to an area labelled 'The Place of Meditation'. A bright red stationary blob showed at the end of the row of arrows; logically, Kirk decided that had to be the Director. He quickly memorised the route and set off down one of the corridors in the right direction. Behind him the board switched itself off; ahead Styvek, Director of the Vulcan Research Centre on Clio, noted the signal that told him a visitor was approaching and set the computer on hold. Being a Vulcan he felt no irritation at being disturbed, but being a scientist he was curious to learn what the newcomer might want.

As Kirk approached each junction in the maze of corridors, a yellow arrow flashed on the appropriate wall panel, impressing him forcibly with the automated efficiency of the Centre, so the shock was considerable when a door opened ahead of him at the end of the last corridor and he found himself face to face with an armed warrior whose face guard and sharp-bladed halberd marked him out clearly as being the one 'who acts if cowardice is seen' in the ritual combat of the Kalifee.

Once inside the door Kirk found himself back in the arena on Vulcan, smelling the distinctive harsh spiciness of the burning incense on the central firepit, hearing the chime-bells ringing rhythmically. Beyond the first armed figure he found himself walking between two ranks of warriors and attendants all dressed in the traditional costumes worn only at the formal ritual of the Koonutkalifee. Lost in thought, it took him several moments to realise that the aromatic scent and the sound of bells were not part of his memories but actually present in the hall; the discovery cheered him illogically and he grinned amiably at the final pair of scarf-girt figures, one wielding the lirpa and the other swingling an ahnuoon, barely resisting the childish urge to thumb his nose at these reminders of the time when thanks to McCoy he had once again squeezed victory out of a no-win situation.

"You wished to see me, Captain Kirk?"

Kirk turned sharply towards the unexpected voice, his face burning at the thought of the gesture he had so nearly made, and confronted a tall dignified Vulcan whose plain dark clothes contrasted noticeably with the bright ritual garments of the models.

Kirk pulled himself together and assumed his best diplomatic manner. "You are the Director of this Centre, sir?" he asked with a slight bow.

"I am Styvek. Will you be seated, Captain?"

"You know who I am, sir?" Kirk took the chair indicated and sat.

"Obviously." The Vulcan also sat down and looked at Kirk with one quirked eyebrow which reminded him forcibly of Spock. Whether it was the quizzical expression, or the calm exuded by the Vulcan Kirk was not sure, but his hesitation melted away.

"I wish to ask for your assistance," he began bluntly. "Since you know me you will naturally also know that my First Officer is Commander Spock of Vulcan."

Styvek nodded briefly. "Indeed. If it is in connection with him that you need help, Captain, I am at a loss to understand why you should come to an historian. But I am, of course, at your service."

"Did you know that Spock has been in prison on Clio for a week?" Kirk shot the question out deliberately, and was very pleased when a faint twitch of eyebrow showed he had surprised the Vulcan. "I see you didn't know. So you probably are ignorant of the rest of the story as well."

There was no doubt of either Styvek's ignorance or his interest now, and Kirk hastily sketched in the background of the situation, beginning with their first visit to Professor Gnoskein's laboratory, though he said little about the infamous solipsist machine. At the end of the recital Styvek appeared as nearly agitated as it is possible for a mature Vulcan to be outside of the logic-ripping emotionalism of Pon Farr.

"Captain, your information is of the utmost consequence; it is imperative that I see Spock as soon as possible. But first if you will excuse me a moment I will endeavour to make contact with Commissioner Ferris and arrange a meeting with him. I shall return to you shortly."

Without more ado Styvek strode rapidly out of the hall through a doorway behind the computer console, leaving Kirk torn between relief that his story had evidently been accepted without question and concern at the censorious tone in which Styvek had spoken of seeing Spock. As always when he was worried, Kirk found it impossible to sit still and wait for events to catch up with him; a very few moments after Styvek had gone off in the Vulcan equivalent of a tearing hurry the Captain was pacing the floor and eventually found himself drawn towards an unexpected exhibit situated in the further part of the huge L-shaped room and apparently representing a cave hollowed out in dark-red Vulcan rock.

When he got to within six metres of the cave, Kirk felt a tingling sensation and knew he had passed a force field; then a sudden breathlessness as waves of dry heat engulfed him suggested that this cave, which was presumably the Place of the Meditation, was preserved for some reason in a Vulcan atmosphere. Kirk wondered uneasily if he had violated a taboo by crossing the force field, but quickly rejected the idea: the Vulcans were too logical a people to situate a forbidden area in a place with such easy access.

Wishing for a cooler breeze or a shot of tri-ox, Kirk nevertheless found himself irresistably drawn towards the glowing cave which a closer inspection revealed as being considerably larger than he had suspected. A cleft in the back of the first cavern led to an inner chamber where the flickering light of the familiar Vulcan fire-pot nestling in the lap of its Guardian struck green glints from a block of veined stone something like onyx which was set on a stele of dull black rock. Peering more closely, Kirk made out the sweeping line of an ear and a dark winged eyebrow highlighted by the pulsing flame, and wondered who or what the carved head represented.

"It is the head of Surak, carved by Sepek, one of the Six Companions at the Place of the Meditation."

Kirk turned as Styvek came into the chamber. "How did you know...?" he began, then stopped abruptly. "Of course you must have scores of people asking or wanting to ask the same question."

"Three hundred and forty seven so far this planetary year," was the calm reply.

"Including Vulcans?" Kirk wanted to know.

Styvek raised an eyebrow again in that Spockish gesture. "No, Captain. Any Vulcan would recognise the carving at once. It is both ancient and famous."

"You mean this is the original, not a replica?"

"Certainly." Styvek noticed Kirk's tentative hand movement. "Examine it if you wish, Captain. Pick it up, it is not fixed."

"But if it's an image of Surak?"

"We do not consider it an icon or in any way sacred, Captain, if that is what you are implying. It is beautiful and very ancient, therefore we value it as

part of our heritage, but it is not sacrosanct."

The stone felt cool in his hands despite the desert heat of the cavern; he turned it carefully, noticing the incredible skill with which the sculptor had used the darker layer of the stone for the slanting eyebrows and sleek close-cap hair that framed the exquisitely carved lighter green scrollwork of the soaring ears.

"The material is plaktein - bloodstone," Styvek explained. "It is rare and much appreciated by artists for its close texture and rich colour shades. This carving has been handed down in my family for countless generations since the time of Sepek. Before it came here it was kept in the family house at T'khan Sai."

"T'khan Sai? But Amanda said... I mean, I thought that was Sarek's family house?"

Styvek inclined his head. "Indeed. But Sarek is my close kinsman. As you can tell from the clan name-form common to all males of the line of Sepek."

So that explained the eyebrow! Kirk wondered if the grave, almost portentous tone was normal when discussing family matters. Certainly the Vulcan had been unusually forthcoming, even for a historian. All the Vulcans he had previously known had been markedly reticent about personal things, though it was true he had only met them during some family crisis. And it was another crisis that had brought him to Styvek, not an interest in Vulcan heirlooms.

Carefully replacing the sculpture on its pedestal, Kirk turned away from history, composed his features to a good Vulcan neutrality, and came back to the present. "May I ask, sir, if you have succeeded in making contact with Commissioner Ferris?"

"Yes."

The bald monosyllable was not encouraging. Nor was the grim tone. In silence the Vulcan turned and led the way back to the main part of the room beyond the forcefield. Then he paused and looked thoughtfully at the Human as if weighing him up.

"I must see Spock. I ask you to accompany me, Captain. There must be a witness to the Sei-daya as is laid down in the Precepts. 'Who enters the mind of another must submit his own to the probe.'"

As he kept pace grimly with the taller Vulcan's effortless strides, thanking his lucky stars that the planetoid was kept at Terran gravity and temperature, Kirk reflected that too much of his time on this same planetoid had been spent letting other people take the lead. The situation was unusual and uncongenial to a man of Kirk's forceful personality, and he could feel his temper wearing a bit thin at the edges. He found himself blaming Spock while at the same time he worried over the unpalatable fact that it was his last attempt to force matters in the inquiry that had precipitated the revelation of Spock's unVulcan activities, which in turn was to lead to the ominous-sounding Sei-daya. Glancing sideways at the cold alien profile of his companion, Kirk began to wonder whether his second attempt at taking things into his own hands might not have even more disastrous consequences.

\* \* \*

Styvek led the way by a more direct route than the Great Wall of China and they soon reached the North American block of the Terran Centre. To the right of the Empire State Building, (top thirty-three storeys only), was a small group of wooden houses with false facades which reminded Kirk vividly of his unwilling visit to Tombstone, Arizona, and recalled also the mind meld by which Spock had saved their lives on that occasion.

Styvek stopped outside one building and pushed open the swing doors. To Kirk's astonishment Doulos stood just inside the room whose wall posters and furniture proclaimed it the sheriff's office. The Captain's mind had been running on primitive, noisome jails like the one he had sampled on Sarpeidon, or even the medieval dungeon of Pyris VII complete with fetters - he would not put

anything past Scaytot - and he felt some relief at discovering the exact nature of Spock's place of incarceration, even being able to smile at the high-handed way in which Styvek dealt with the amateur gaoler's persistent attempts at obstruction.

"He just steam-rollered over Doulos as if he were less than the dust beneath his chariot wheels," Kirk told McCoy later.

"Humph," was the doctor's acid reply. "Sounds like Spock. Must run in the family."

When Doulos had reluctantly handed over the keys to the lock-up Styvek made his way along the narrow passage to the fourth cell which Kirk was glad to see had solid walls rather than an open grill: at least Spock had had some privacy, though there was a judas in the door which could be opened from outside. Styvek inserted the key in the lock then turned to Kirk.

"I must ask you not to seek to interfere in what follows, Captain. You are here as a witness because the tradition requires that. You are not a participant. Do you accept this?"

Kirk's mouth tightened. Then he shrugged. "If there must be a witness, who would you ask if I refused?"

Styvek looked sharply at him. "I should have no alternative but to call on Doulos," he said simply.

"Then I have no alternative either." Kirk grimaced ruefully. "Let's get on with whatever it is."

"Logical, Captain." Styvek pushed open the door and led the way into the small cell.

A rapid survey showed Kirk the palliasse on the bunk and the primitive but apparently clean toilet facilities in the corner, then his attention was focussed on Spock, who was seated at the wooden table gazing at his steepled fingers. He rose as they entered and clasped his hands behind his back, his eyes fixed on Styvek. Kirk's presence he ignored completely.

"Spock, I have been told that you admit having forced a mind meld on a Human. Is that correct?"

"Your information is correct, Styvek."

"You know what must be the consequences of your action?"

"I know the consequences."

"You accept Sei-daya with the Captain as witness? A human witness for a Human victim."

"I accept Sei-daya."

"And...?"

There was a perceptible hesitation and Kirk was conscious of a tightening knot in his stomach. Whatever this Sei-daya might be it was obvious the Vulcan found the idea of his Captain's being the witness distasteful.

"Well, Spock?" Styvek's voice was as cold as the plaktein carving and his face as remote and unemotional.

"I accept the Captain as witness." Spock's voice was perfectly composed but Kirk sensed the effort the Vulcan had made to achieve the necessary control.

"Very well. Be it so." Styvek walked over to the chair on which Spock had been sitting and which was the only one in the room. Spock stood aside, waited until the elder Vulcan had pulled the chair away from the table and seated himself, then without looking at the reluctant witness knelt before Styvek's chair with bowed head.

As Styvek's hands reached for the meld position, Kirk realised with horror what Sei-daya meant: half-heard words came back to him. What was it? Who enters

the mind of another must submit himself to the probe? Unable to leave the cell Kirk turned away, shaking, and caught a glimpse of greedy eyes trying to peer through the open judas. That at least was something he could prevent. Acutely conscious of the immobile, unspeaking Vulcans, Kirk planted himself in front of the door with his back to the cell, fighting down the urge to put his hands over his ears to block out the silence.

\* \* \*

"Of course, once Ferris realised who Styvek was and that Spock was his kinsman, Scaytot didn't have a chance."

"A chance of what?" McCoy was struggling to make sense of the decidedly incoherent narrative he was receiving while rejoicing to see the old vibrant eagerness back in the Captain's face and voice.

"Of doing any real harm to Spock. Come on, Bones, you know Ferris. Can you see him supporting a mere research director like Scaytot against a member of one of the most important families on Vulcan? Ferris works for the Federation, remember, and he's a born bureaucrat; he knows where the influence lies!"

"Uhuh!" McCoy nodded. "Put you still haven't explained how Spock got away with it, even so. Ferris goes down there breathing righteous indignation at every pore, and then a few hours later you reappear like a genie out of the bottle and tell me Spock's been given a reprimand and six months loss of seniority. And that's a joke! Dammit, Spock's got so much seniority he doesn't want, it's doing him a positive favour to knock six months off."

Kirk grinned happily. "I know! Of course as our dear Commissioner pointed out to a very aggrieved Director - after I had drawn his attention to the fact - Spock had also been imprisoned for eight days in primitive conditions and had been illegally subjected to handcuffs."

"Even so, Jim. I can't see Styvek, or any Vulcan, pulling rank with Ferris, so why didn't Scaytot insist on the full rigour of the law?"

"That's the best of it, Bones. He didn't dare. Don't you see? Styvek made it quite clear that the mind-touch Spock had used was abhorrent to any good Vulcan - hence the Sei-daya - but it is not actually illegal because no-one has ever thought to make it so. Therefore, if Spock was telling the truth about the incident, and in Styvek's presence they had to accept that he was - especially as Styvek assured Ferris that Gnoskein was only suffering from severe esper shock and would recover completely in a few days - then all that was left was a minor charge of technical assault."

"Jim Kirk, I swear you're worse than Samuel T. Cogley with your 'therefore' and 'in that case'!" McCoy grinned reminiscently. "So Scaytot had to knuckle under?"

"He was mad, too. But if he tried to bring up the mind-touch, he knew I would retaliate with the solipsist machine. There's no doubt at all that that monster is a far worse breach of ethics than any mind-touch."

"And the professor comes out of hospital and goes on perfecting it? He can get someone else to test his confounded mecahnical mind-borer, can't he?"

"Not when Starfleet have read my report! I saw a gleam in Ferris's eye too. He'll insist on being told about it, I'm sure."

"Who cares about the ethics of a research historian?" McCoy was blatantly sceptical.

Kirk smiled knowingly. "Nobody. But they sure as hell care about security! Don't you realise that if that machine is ever perfected it will be the end of confidentiality or security? Gnoskein kept talking about the subject being dead because that's how his mind works. But of course they don't have to be. Any time, any place, he said. It could be last week or last year or even last night, I suspect. And don't forget it need not be at the moment of discussion. All you'll have to do will be to focus on one of the Top Brass when he's walking

along peacefully considering the briefing he's just had under top security conditions and hey presto! The latest secrets all ready to sell to the Klingons. I tell you, Bones, this project is dynamite!"

"And you believe Spock pretended to go along with it and then... Well, what then? Why exactly did he use the mind-touch?"

Kirk paced across the office and back twice before he answered. "I'm not sure, Bones. That's the one thing I'm not clear about. He should be back on board soon and I'm hoping he'll explain."

McCoy nodded sympathetically. It would hurt Jim badly if this came between him and Spock, and with that perverse, computerised Vulcan you never knew where you were!

The intercom bleeped at that moment and Kirk quickly flicked the switch on the desk. "Kirk here."

Uhura's face appeared on the screen. "Captain, I have a call from Clio. A request for permission to beam aboard."

"Who is it, Lieutenant?" Kirk shrugged at McCoy's enquiring eyebrow.

"Captain, it's Mr. Spock." Uhura's voice could not conceal her surprise at the unusual situation though she had her face well under control.

"Permission granted, Lieutenant." Kirk took a deep breath. "Tell Chief Kyle to beam Mr. Spock aboard and to ask him to report to me in my quarters immediately. Kirk out."

Without looking at the doctor, Kirk switched off the viewer and headed out of Sickbay while McCoy gaped after him, open-mouthed. What the hell was Spock playing at now?

\* \* \*

Kirk sat at his desk, trying to relax his tense shoulder muscles. The request for permission to come aboard had shaken him badly. It looked painfully obvious that Spock was going to be difficult. Kirk was not exactly easy, either. He'd told McCoy most of what had happened on Clio, but had skated over the fact that it was his actions every time which had forced the issue. Especially the Sei-daya: that was what was worrying Kirk most. How would Spock react to his Captain having brought that on him - and witnessing it?

The sound of the door buzzer sent all Kirk's carefully relaxed muscles into knotted lumps again. He breathed in deeply and expelled it slowly. "Come."

The Vulcan entered without delay but stopped a couple of feet inside the door and stood stiffly, his hands behind his back and his face a sculpured mask. "You sent for me, sir, or I woild not have intruded."

"Intruded?" Oh God, this was even worse than he had feared.

Spock ignored the interruption as if it had not been made. "My application for transfer will be on your desk in the morning, sir. It should take no more than fifteen point four days to process. During that time I respectfully suggest that you assign me to the alternative Bridge watch."

Spock, for God's sake what the hell are you talking about? If you really want to transfer I must accept it, though lord knows I don't want you to go. But alternative watches? Have I offended you so bitterly you can't even stand watch with me?"

"You have not offended me, Captain." Was there a trace of warmth, of feeling, in the voice now? "The boot to use your Terran idiom, is on the other foot." Spock hesitated, the surprised expression on Kirk's face was so obviously genuine. He forced himself to continue. "You must recall, sir, stating that you did not wish to have to see me, ever again. They are your own words. Now with your permission, I shall go to my quarters."

"When I said that," Kirk broke in hastily as the Vulcan seemed poised for

immideiate flight, "I thought you had been seduced by that damned machine and Gnoskein's suggestion that you test it. And I was mad at all of you. Then of course when I heard what you had done I realised I was wrong." He looked at the expressionless face, hoping for a reaction, but there was no sign of softening. "I didn't trust you, Spock," he admitted honestly. "And I'm sorry. I thought that was why you wanted a transfer?"

The dark eyes bored into him as Spock tried to assimilate what the Human was saying. The Vulcan looked exhausted, which was not surprising, Kirk realised, after a week in that godawful cell and the trauma of the Sei-daya and everything.

"Sit down, Spock, for goodness sake." Kirk waited till the Vulcan had reluctantly obeyed. "I owe you another aplogy," he went on, determined to get the whole matter out in the open. "It was me who told Styvek about the whole affair and got you involved with him."

Spock shook his head decidedly. "You owe me no apology, Jim, for that or anything else. My own action made the Sei-daya inevitable and I was prepared for it. And you were quite right about the first meeting in the lab. I was... tempted by that machine." He stopped abruptly, and Kirk realised that Spock was embarrassed. Only once before had he seen that expression on the Vulcan's face.

"There's no need to be embarrassed about it, Mr. Spock," he murmured. "Curiosity isn't limited to Vulcans. Even a Human can be tempted by the idea of total knowledge. In fact, if we are to believe the stories, that is exactly what the Tempter offered to Man."

"To be accurate, I understand the offer was in fact first made to the woman, Captain." There was a faint smile in Spock's voice, though none showed on the tranquil face.

"There you are, then," Kirk retorted. "And it's not as though you succumbed, unlike my dubious forebears." Kirk's smile was clearly visible on his face, but vanished as the Vulcan suddenly stood up and turned away, gripping his hands together. "Spock! What's the matter?"

"I am ashamed." The words were forced out as Spock continued grimly with no trace now of humour. "I do not merit your apology or your sympathy, Captain. You see, I was not merely tempted by the machine. I fell."

"You mean...?" Kirk tried to finish the sentence but couldn't. No wonder Spock looked as if all the Furies were after him with that burden on his mind.

"Yes, Captain. I used the solipsist machine to enter the mind of another person without his consent or knowledge." Now the murder was out Spock was unwilling to see the condemnation in his Captain's face and kept his own averted, his eyes fixed firmly on the far wall of the cabin.

"Look at me, Spock." The voice was quiet, but there was no doubt that it was an order.

Reluctantly the Vulcan turned, steeling himself to accept whatever was coming. Kirk's face was for once unreadable.

"Was it really just curiosity that made you do it, or did you have any other reason?" The question demanded an honest answer.

"I had realised that if the machine could do what Professor Gnoskein claimed for it, then I had to stop him completeing it somehow," Spock began slowly, almost as if he were thinking out his actions. "The only certain means that occurred to me was to use my telepathic powers to wipe certain formulae and concepts from his mind. Before taking such a drastic step I convinced myself it was... logical" (there was a fine edge of scorn on the quiet voice at that moment) "to test the machine myself."

The composed voice could not entirely conceal the strain of the confession, and Kirk found himself trying to ease the Vulcan's sense of guilt, quite forgetting his own original sweeping condemnation of anyone using the machine.

"What particualr itch did you satisfy?" he asked lightly, hastily, recasting his question at the sight of Spock's incomprehension. "I mean, what historical secret did you take the opportunity to uncover? Gnoskein's favourite, Napoleon's reasons for attacking Russia? The true nature of the Holy Grail? Mind you, I'm not sure you could do that unless you found the originator of the story." Kirk felt himself babbling on to fill the silence which was becoming embarrassing. "I think, myself, I'd have been more interested in the truth about the death of Hephaistion, or even just what Alexander was thinking when he yearned for more worlds to conquer."

Lost in a daydream, Kirk nearly missed an even more inexplicable phenomenon just under his nose: Spock was blushing! "Come on, out with it," he ordered, intensely curious now. "Whose mind did you enter?"

"Yours."

The word was so soft he almost failed to hear it and stared dumbstruck at his First Officer. The silence was charged with so many emotions it could not last. Typically it was Kirk who broke it.

"You entered my mind?" He felt a surge of anger but crushed it down ruthlessly. "Well, I suppose that was better than a complete stranger's. After all, you've been there before, so to speak, with my permission." He managed a small smile. "I can hardly cry rape, under the circumstances."

Spock still stood there stiffly, his ears distinctly green at the tips, waiting for the rejection that this time must surely come, and quite unprepared for the Captain's almost jocular tone - it sounded almost as if Kirk was making excuses for his inexcusable behaviour.

"When, Spock?" Kirk was slowly coming to realise that the Vulcan could have violated any of his most secret thoughts. No, correction, had in fact categorically done so. It was impossible to grasp; was it also impossible to forgive? What was the old tag? To understand all would be to forgive all? It suddenly became very important to know the answer to his question. He looked at the Vulcan. "When, Spock?"

The dark eyes met his bravely as Spock answered, conscious that he was probably about to lose the only real friend he had ever had. "I did not want to intrude into anything too personal," he began awkwardly, "but also I must confess to having had a great desire to experience, just once in my life, certain ... Human feelings." He ground to a halt.

Human feelings could be a great temptation to a Vulcan, but which ones? Kirk looked at him consideringly, but all he said was, "Go on, Spock. Tell me exactly when you decided to eavesdrop on my Human feelings. That I have a right to know."

"Yes, sir." Spock swallowed convulsively. This was worse than the Sei-daya because it had to be verbalised. He wondered if Kirk had any idea of the severity of the penalty he was quite justifiably inflicting. The Vulcan summoned all his control and ploughed doggedly on with his confession.

"I determined that a true test of the machine required me to enter your mind at a period before I knew you, and I chose the few minutes on Starbase One just before you boarded the Enterprise to take up your command."

There was silence in the cabin. The hazel eyes were very bright as Kirk at last broke the stillness.

"And what did you feel in my mind at that moment, my Vulcan friend?"

Slowly Spock relaxed into the chair again and gazed at the gold-shirted figure, seeing a younger James Kirk, proud, overjoyed, awed and scared to death of his beautiful ship and the four hundred and thirty souls aboard her whose lives and deaths were about to become his responsibility. Looking into the dark eyes, Kirk knew what he saw and nodded slowly; and Spock realised he was forgiven.

This time it was the door buzzer which broke the silence, but the strain had already eased, and with the entrance of an ebullient McCoy the mood rapidly became festive.

"I thought our melanochroious aeruginous jailbird might like a drink," he explained, waving the brandy bottle triumphantly.

He was awarded the accolade of a double raised eyebrow. "That is an ornithological species which I have not hitherto encountered, Doctor." Spock peered round the cabin as if looking for something. "Where have you out the cage, Captain?"

"You don't fool me, Spock," began the doctor, delighted at the success of his carefully prepared joke. Then he tripped over a chair which had unaccountably got in his path and stumbled forward with a yelp, to find himself braced by a titanium arm while Spock's other hand rescued the brandy bottle from the doctor's precarious grasp.

"What the devil!"

Kirk looked round from the cupboard in astonishment at the abrupt change of tone; then automatically set the glasses down on the table and stared as McCoy, now totally serious, held Spock's arm and gazed at his wrist where the sleeve had ridden up.

"Show me the other one," he ordered tersely.

With visible reluctance the Vulcan put the bottle on the table and submitted a second arm to the doctor's scrutiny, now reinforced by the ubiquitous scanner. McCoy had pushed back the sleeve and Kirk looked in horror at the exposed wrists. The biliverdens colouring was fully developed and the rich blue and yellow bruising showed clearly against the pale Vulcan skin.

"How long were you in handcuffs, Spock?" Kirk made no attempt to hide the anger and concern in his voice. Scaytot was going to pay for this!

"Seven point nine days, Captain. But it is not important." Spock removed his arms firmly from McCoy's grasp and pulled his sleeves well down.

"Report to me in Sickbay before you go on duty," the doctor ordered gruffly, tucking his scanner away.

"Unnecessary, Doctor; the bruising will soon fade."

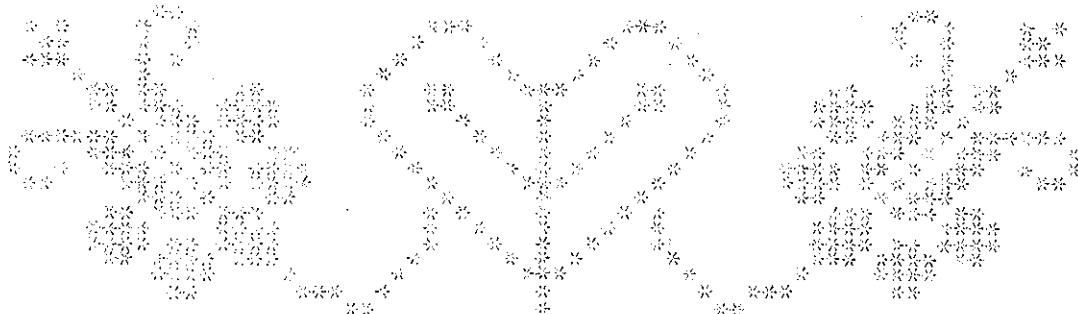
"I could make it an order, Mr. Spock!"

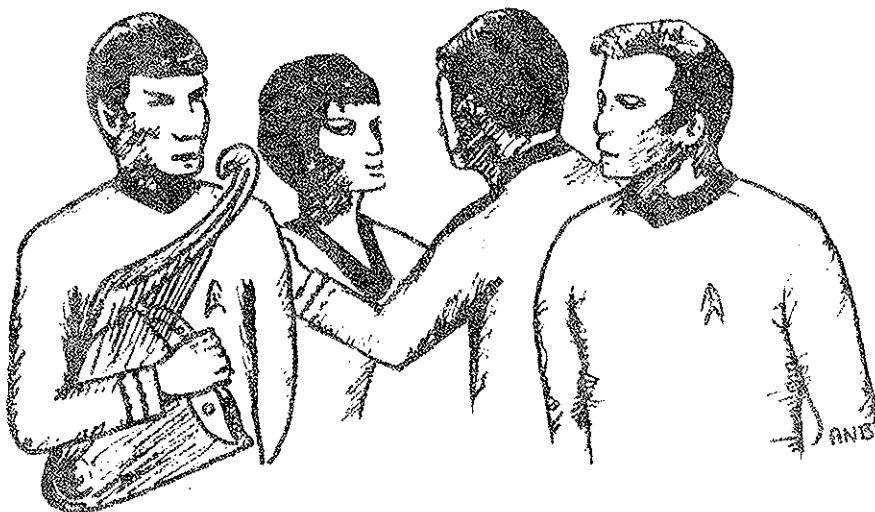
Spock looked from one to the other of his friends and yielded to the logic of the situation. "Unnecessary, Captain. I will go."

"That's the fellow!" McCoy seized the brandy bottle and proceeded to fill the glasses. "Come on, both of you. I've got a toast."

Spock and Kirk did as they were told and raised their glasses, exchanging a long look.

"Here's to crime!" said the doctor, and drank deeply.





## THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL

by

Ann Preece

There were times, Spock mused as he allowed Uhura to lead him over to the makeshift stage in the main Rec Room amidst much cheering and applause from the rest of the crew, when he wondered how he succeeded in allowing himself to be talked into such a situation as this.

It was his usual custom at this time of year to seek refuge within the quiet confines of his quarters while the temporary 'madness' of the Christmas season -- insanity being too strong a word to describe his colleagues' behaviour at such a time -- eventually wore itself out, and the crew of the Enterprise was restored to its usual state of peak efficiency.

This year, however, was different; this year the Enterprise had a new Captain, and when Kirk had asked his First Officer to 'put in an appearance' at the traditional Christmas party, Spock had found himself accepting the invitation without the slightest hesitation; it would seem that he could refuse this particular Human nothing.

In the year since Kirk had taken over from Pike as Captain of the Enterprise, Spock had found himself agreeing to things which, until lately, he would have thought of as impossible, the most memorable being the recent shore leave on Kynuzia\* a little over three months ago. He and Kirk had spent an unforgettable ten days getting to know each other, and developing and strengthening the unique and very special bond of friendship which had drawn them together from the very beginning of their working relationship.

And now here he was, participating in an event which had always filled him with a certain amount of dread; he had agreed to provide the musical accompaniment for the Enterprise's extremely gifted and talented Communications Officer as she performed several of the songs which proved so popular with the rest of the crew. Once Uhura had found out that Spock intended to come to the festivities, she had been determined to persuade the usually reserved Vulcan to join her in one of their now-famous duets. It had taken much arm-twisting, as well as a certain amount of gentle persuasion in order to succeed, but perseverance, plus a little help from Kirk, had combined with Uhura's not insignificant charm, and she had won through in the end.

As Spock and Uhura made their way to the podium, the disordered ranks of crew members parted to allow them to pass, and as the duo took up their places a sense of anticipation seemed to overcome the audience, each person wondering if his or her own particular song would be included in the repertoire.

As Spock seated himself his dark eyes surreptitiously scanned the crowd - waiting now with bated breath for the first chords of music which would herald the start of the concert - until his roving gaze finally alighted on the one person who had helped to bring a meaning and a purpose to what could so easily have become an empty existence.

The Captain stood at the bar in the company of McCoy and Scott - Spock might

\* See 'You've Got a Friend' - Enterprise - Log Entries 50, now out of print.

have known that those two wouldn't be too far away from liquid refreshment - and as the Vulcan watched, Kirk helped himself to a generous measure of Saurian Brandy before turning to meet his First Officer's gaze. A wealth of unspoken words flashed between them in that brief moment of contact, before Kirk smiled and raised his glass in a silent gesture of encouragement and support. Spock inclined his head slightly in answer before turning his attention to Uhura, who had stooped down to whisper something in his ear.

As the lights dimmed an expectant hush fell over the assembled group, and the first soft notes from Spock's lyrette broke the silence, soon to be joined by Uhura's beautifully rich tones. For nearly an hour they delighted their appreciative audience with a wide variety of songs and musical numbers which ranged from the traditional music of Uhura's heritage, to the more popular songs of the present, finally culminating with a very special Vulcan composition which symbolised the true meaning of friendship and brotherhood.

Although the words sung were in Vulcan the meaning was abundantly clear to anyone who had taken the trouble to study the language, and that meaning wasn't lost on one member of the audience. Kirk couldn't help but wonder if Spock had included that particular song mainly for his benefit, especially as their relationship had undergone a subtle change over the preceding months, a change which had brought them closer together both during their working hours and their off-duty periods. They had begun to share so much: quiet evenings spent talking and reminiscing about their past lives, so different and yet so similar; happy evenings spent listening to music or engaged in friendly games of chess; peaceful, contented evenings when the need for words was unnecessary, when the silences were just as special, just as precious; two kindred spirits drawn together by an indefinable bond, sharing an affinity which was almost frightening in its intensity.

As Spock and Uhura left the stage to thunderous applause - their place immediately taken by an over-enthusiastic Kevin Riley - Kirk left the bar and moved over to meet his friend, adding his congratulations to everyone else's, and not surprised to find McCoy close on his heels.

"Well, well, well - if it isn't our very own Mr. Spock. I didn't know you had it in you," the doctor remarked as he leaned forward to give Uhura a congratulatory kiss. "To what do we owe this honour? Rumour has it that you aren't usually in the habit of gracing these occasions with your presence. Has something happened to make you change your mind?" He grinned, winking mischievously at a smiling Uhura.

Before Spock could answer Kirk had leapt to his defence. "Didn't you know, Rones, that there's a first time for everything - and it isn't only the ladies who have the monopoly on changing their minds! I asked Spock to come here tonight - and he accepted. I don't see anything extraordinary in that!" he added with an expression on his face that seemed to say, 'Read more into that if you dare.'

Realising he was treading on dangerous ground, McCoy thought it was safer - and wiser - to change the subject. "Can I interest you in a drink, Spock?" he asked, waving his arm in the general direction of the bar.

"Thank you, Doctor, but no," Spock replied, declining the offer as graciously as he could. "I think one of us in the condition you appear to be in is quite sufficient."

"What d'ya mean?" McCoy exploded, having risen to the bait just as Spock knew he would. "I'm not drunk, if that's what you're implying! Okay, I may be a little... merry... but dammit all, it is Christmas, in case you two hadn't noticed!"

"Okay, Rones - there's no need to get so excited," Kirk interrupted, trying to pour oil on troubled water. "Try to remember that this is supposed to be the season of goodwill to all men, so why don't you two call a truce - even if it is only for a couple of days." Grinning, he glanced over at the Communications Officer. "Uhura, I believe our Chief Medical Officer needs someone to

calm him down - it looks as if you're elected. C'mon, Spock - let's get out of here while we're both still in one piece."

As they turned to leave Kirk glanced beyond Spock just in time to see Christine Chapel making her way through the crush towards them, a sprig of mistletoe clutched in her hand. Doesn't that woman ever give up? he wondered as he steered his bemused First Officer - who was somewhat surprised at their rather hasty retreat - towards the door and out into the comparative safety of the corridor.

"Sorry about the undignified exit back there," Kirk apologised as they stepped into the turbolift and he gave the voice command which transported them to Deck 5. "Chris Chapel was heading towards you, complete with mistletoe and a single purpose in mind. I'm sure you don't need me to explain to you what that means..."

"Mistletoe?" Spock queried, somewhat puzzled at first, until recollection returned. "Ah, yes... yet another of your quaint old Earth customs, I believe," he added, a slight almost-smile playing about his lips as he followed Kirk into the Captain's quarters.

After the pandemonium of the Rec Room, Kirk's quarters were a blessed haven of peace and tranquillity, and Spock was more than grateful to follow his Captain's suggestion and relax in the chair indicated.

"I see I was expected," he remarked as he surveyed the low table set with delicacies from Earth and Vulcan, spying many of his own particular favourite dishes side by side with unfamiliar ones.

"Well... shall we say I know you a little better by now," Kirk smiled as he handed his guest a glass of Vulcan wine. "As you can see, I've done my homework."

"Indeed - and you are to be commended on your choices. This looks most inviting."

"I thought you'd prefer to eat here rather than with the others, and at least we can have a few hours to ourselves for a change. I don't know about you, but all the noise down there was beginning to give me a headache. Must be getting old," he added, somewhat ruefully, before laughing at the look of disbelief on Spock's face.

While they ate Kirk entertained Spock with narratives of Christmases spent with his family in Iowa. The Captain was an excellent - and humorous - story teller, and Spock spent a fascinating hour being transported back into another time and another place as Kirk's memories, embellished by a vivid imagination, brought to life amusing anecdotes of a happy childhood.

As he listened to Kirk's mellow tones, Spock allowed himself the luxury of relaxing, and a warm feeling of contentment, which had nothing to do with the Vulcan wine, began to spread throughout his entire being. Over the preceding months a subtle change in his character had taken place; the cold, aloof and reticent Vulcan who had greeted Kirk on his arrival on board the Enterprise was gone, and in his place there remained a warm and caring person, one who was not afraid to unbend when in the company of a very special friend. For the first time in his adult life Spock felt needed, accepted for himself as he was, not for what he ought to be, and he was not afraid to admit that he owed it all to the one man sitting opposite him, a man who had taken the time to care, to penetrate through the cold Vulcan exterior and reach the very lonely, very vulnerable person within...

The silence in the Captain's quarters returned Spock with a jolt to his present surroundings to find that Kirk had stopped talking and was regarding his friend with an amused expression on his face.

"You looked as though you were miles away," Kirk remarked, laughing.

Deeply embarrassed, Spock stammered, "Jim, I'm sorry. That was unforgiveable of me. I was listening..."

"I's okay - there's no need to apologise. I have been known to talk too much, and as you're such a good listener I was beginning to get carried away!"

Replacing his glass on the table Kirk stood up, motioning to Spock to remain seated. "No, stay where you are... I won't be a minute..." he called over his shoulder as he disappeared into the night cabin. There was the sound of a drawer being opened, the rustle of paper, and moments later Kirk re-emerged carrying an unusually-shaped parcel. Clearing a space on the table he placed the mysterious object in front of Spock with the softly-spoken words, "Merry Christmas!"

"Jim?" There was puzzlement, wonder and awe contained in that one word.

"Co on - open it," Kirk coaxed, his eyes aglow with suppressed excitement, and Spock was reminded once again that this was how Kirk must have looked as a child - a child caught up in the wonder and excitement of Christmas.

Leaving his chair, Spock knelt in front of the low table and with trembling fingers began to remove the wrappings from around the gift. The last layer of paper fell away to reveal a very old, extremely rare and beautifully carved Earth-type lyre, similar to but slightly larger than Spock's ~~evil~~ Vulcan lyrette.

Lovingly, Spock's long fingers caressed the delicate curves and intricate patterns on the antique wood, before plucking out a few random notes on the finely-tuned strings. Totally speechless, he turned the already treasured possession over in his hands, countless emotions crossing his face in quick-fire succession, the dark eyes alight with gratitude - and something else?

"Jim... what can I say? Words cannot express my thanks... my appreciation. How can I ever repay you?"

Kirk smiled. "You can repay me - by playing for a while... if you aren't too tired, that is?"

Spock needed no second bidding, and within moments soft, gentle notes filled the air. Leaning back in his seat Kirk closed his eyes and was immediately transported into the realms of his own imagination. Allowing his subconscious mind to take control he was swept away into the land of make-believe so magically brought to life by Spock's expert playing.

After the last notes had died away there was silence for several minutes before Kirk murmured softly, "That was beautiful - thank you."

"It is I who should be thanking you," Spock replied, trying to hide his embarrassment at having revealed so much emotion in such a short space of time, and greatly troubled by the thought that he had no gift to give Kirk in return. "I should have remembered your custom of exchanging gifts at this time of year... but I didn't, and consequently I have nothing to give you. I'm so sorry..." Acutely discomfited, Spock fell silent.

"Hey - there's no need to be embarrassed," Kirk reproved gently. "I haven't given you a gift so that you can give me one in return. In any case, I've often felt that there's just as much pleasure in the giving of gifts as in the receiving. No - I've had the lyre for some weeks now; bought it about a month ago, in fact. Remember - we had a 24 hour stop-over at Lucienia? There was this small antique shop which I happened on quite by chance. The moment I saw the lyre I knew it was the perfect gift for you, and now seemed the right time to give it to you..."

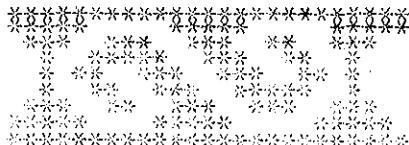
"But if only I had thought..." Spock persisted.

"My friend - you've given me so much more than any material gift could have provided. You've given me your friendship - and I can't begin to tell you just how much that means to me. You're always there in times of stress or trouble, someone to turn to when the going gets rough; you've brought an end to the empty hours of loneliness; and you allow me to be myself, to escape from the rigours of command decisions and responsibilities even if only for a short time. I should say that one lyre is small payment for all that you've given me..."

Silence followed Kirk's words, but one look at Spock's face gave him the answer he was looking for...

\* \* \*

Later, as he prepared for bed, Kirk allowed his mind to dwell on the events of that evening, seeing again the look of unconcealed amazement on Spock's face as he'd examined the lyre, and happy in the knowledge that such a simple act had given so much pleasure. He smiled fondly at the memory. Spock was so concerned that he'd been unable to give his friend a material gift; Kirk wondered if he would ever realise that he'd given him the greatest gift of all - love.



#### ONE OF A KIND

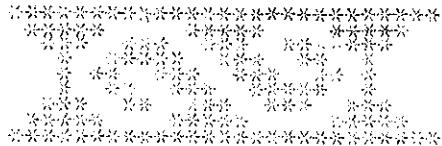
The harsh heat of Vulcan  
Seared my lungs and throat,  
And my eyes misted at the sight  
Of what awaited us.  
The home of Vulcan's errant son,  
The fortress of peace  
Amidst the storm of logic.

Little really registered on my mind,  
For pride had taken over  
All other rational thought.  
My best friend, my soul-mate named Spock,  
Was being honoured by his land.  
His people were finally acknowledging  
Him as the unique person he was.

So many honours bestowed in history,  
Yet none before like this.  
Spock, the only one of his kind,  
The honour the only one in existence,  
And I, asked to share it all,  
To be at Spock's side, as always.  
Our souls touching, and forever touched.

It did not last long.  
The ceremony over, we returned  
To familiarity aboard our home  
Named Enterprise.  
No words were needed, a look was enough,  
For we both knew how the other felt.  
After so much rejection...  
Acceptance from all!

Karen Hayden



## ONCE A YEAR

by

Vicki Richards

Spock could hear someone singing. And he recognised the voice. He had heard that voice raised in song rather a lot over the past week or so, but then it had only been one of the many trials and tribulations a Vulcan among Humans had to put up with at this time of year.

The voice was not quite as jarring as Kevin Riley's, but even the best voice could become a little... tiresome when it sang the same songs over and over again in what Humans term a 'jolly' manner.

And Scotty was always exceedingly jolly during the festive season. Spock sighed in resignation.

As Spock picked his way over a fallen streamer lying in the corridor, he found himself wondering if maybe he ought to learn Gaelic properly; it might help him appreciate the Chief Engineer's songs a bit more. But he didn't really think it would - he didn't think anything could.

The singing was coming from the galley; Spock dreaded to think what Scotty was doing in there. He never understood why, after all the drunken revelry of Christmas - which was bad enough on Vulcan tranquillity at the best of times - the crew of the Enterprise found it necessary to embark on further festivities before a week was out.

He found it entirely illogical to celebrate Earth's new year when they were on the other side of the galaxy from his mother's home planet, but that was nothing compared to the illogical activities he had witnessed during the last few days. Christmas on the Enterprise was always the same. And now it was less than twenty-four hours to the dreaded New Year's Eve.

Spock suspected that the owner of the voice had a lot to do with the seasonal fervour spreading through the ship at that moment. Scotty was very strong on Hogmanay.

Not that the rest of them needed a lot of encouragement,

Spock stepped through the galley door to have all his worst fears confirmed. There was Montgomery Scott, tampering with the food synthesisers.

"What are you doing, Mr. Scott?" Spock asked patiently.

The singing stopped. "Oh, hello there, Mr. Spock," came the reply. At least Scotty had the grace to look a bit sheepish. "Why, Ah'm just programmin' ma bairns here so they can add an item to the menu for tomorrow night. Like I always do," he added meaningfully.

Spock had been afraid of that. "Haggis, Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, sir." Spock had been wrong - Scotty wasn't at all sheepish. "But Mr. Spock," he went on, "it's such a shame you won't try haggis. You don't know what you're missin'. It's put some green in your cheeks. Shall I tell you again what's in it?"

Spock managed to conceal his horror. "No, thank you, Mr. Scott," he said with dignity. "I already know the ingredients."

He made his escape and took the nearest turbolift to the Bridge. It was no good asking Jim to put a stop to the Engineer's antics; Jim was just as illogical as the rest of them at this time of year. In fact, Spock had a good idea that it was Jim who had first thought up the plan to hold a fancy dress ball the following night. It was almost more than a Vulcan could stand. And he didn't care how many times McCoy called him a killjoy; no-one was going to see him in fancy dress!

The next day came. Spock spent the early part of it trying to ignore the preparations going on around him, but he found it practically impossible with all the seasonal insanity apparently affecting every member of the crew but him. At least on the Bridge there remained some semblance of normality; Spock decided to stay there for as long as he could.

The evening arrived. Jim had refused point-blank to allow him to work a double shift, and had insisted that he take the night off to relax, if not at the party then in whatever manner Vulcans used for relaxation. He had a good mind to stay put in the safety of his cabin, but eventually decided to venture out and see what was going on. His curiosity always did have a tendency for getting him into trouble.

As he neared the main rec deck he could hear that the party had already started; at least no-one was singing yet. He acknowledged the greetings of some members of the Science Section, who had been detailed to trace and correct the unexpected computer fault he had detected earlier in the day. They were in the corridor, checking out some of the circuitry, and judging by the miserable looks on their faces, wished they were at the ball. But somebody had to be on duty. Spock wished that he was.

A multi-legged alien passed him, waving a claw. If it hadn't been for the "'Evening, Mr. Spock,' that issued from its mouth, he would never have known it was Kyle. If that was a sample of what he was going to find on the rec deck...

Spock almost turned back.

When he did enter the rec deck, he found the party was already in full swing. Music was blaring, coloured lights were flashing; the crew of the Enterprise, transformed into all sizes and shapes of alienness, were gyrating energetically to the rhythm.

If the amount of liquid refreshment being passed around was anything to go by, the party was going to get a lot wilder yet. It might even get worse than Christmas Eve.

He caught sight of a slightly inebriated female yeoman making her way purposefully towards him. Only just in time did he see the bunch of mistletoe hanging directly over his head. It wasn't the first close escape he'd had during the last few days.

Then finally, through the crowd, his Vulcan eyes spotted McCoy. The good doctor was attired in an old-fashioned vampire suit, complete with cape and black top hat. A whole repertoire of remarks he could make to McCoy suddenly jumped into his head; of course, he's have to be very careful, or McCoy would very likely accuse him of making jokes. Perish the thought! But he really would have to be careful; it was extremely difficult to retain correct Vulcan decorum at this time of year, when almost all the Human crew members would do practically anything to get him to make a slip - just one. Well, he wasn't going to make any.

Then he realised who it was standing next to McCoy, and it was all he could do to stop himself from showing open astonishment. It was Jim, dressed as - of all things - a Klingon commander. Sometimes Spock wondered about the Captain.

McCoy noticed him first. "Ah, there you are, Spock," called the doctor jovially. "I see you didn't take my advice to join the rest of us in costume. You could have come as a Gorn, or a computer - or an elf. Why, you'd have brought the house down!"

"Good evening, Doctor McCoy, Commander Kang." Spock nodded at them coolly, leaving McCoy spluttering helplessly into his drink, remembering his own reaction on first seeing Jim's costume; he had nearly collapsed in hysterics. Strange, the effect it seemed to be having on the female crew members, though...

"May I congratulate you on the appropriateness of your costume, Doctor," Spock continued without allowing McCoy time to recover. He was actually

beginning to enjoy himself - not that he'd ever admit it to anyone.

But McCoy's reply was stopped at birth by a sudden clatter from one of the drink dispensers. Glasses and liquid were pouring inexplicably and noisily all over the floor. Within a few seconds, however, a maintenance team arrived and quickly set about restoring the malfunctioning dispenser to its former efficiency. It was needed.

The fancy dress ball returned to enjoying itself, and Kirk and McCoy resumed their conversation. But Spock was thoughtful. Another computer fault? It ought to have been corrected by now.

The party continued. The Doctor and the Captain seemed to be enjoying themselves immensely, if the grins on both of their faces were anything to go by. After a while, people began getting up on the temporary stage erected at the front of the room. Several people told funny stories, each one more censorable than the last, then someone got up to sing. Loud cheers drew Spock's attention to the stage - it was Uhura. The Communications Officer was dressed in traditional Bantu costume, and was getting even more admiring glances than usual. She was just about to start when the lights went out. Vociferous groans and grumbles indicated that the joke wasn't appreciated.

Spock agreed silently. Uhura was someone he did want to hear singing. The emergency lighting came on, followed shortly by the main lights, and Spock noticed another maintenance engineer. Yet another fault?

The Science Officer decided to go over and talk to the engineer; when so many minor faults began occurring within so short a time, logic indicated there must be some interconnecting cause.

He made his way over while everyone else concentrated on Uhura's song. What the engineer told him made him feel slightly and uncharacteristically uneasy. Several more minor faults had appeared in various sections of the ship, including a breakdown of the cargo-bay doors.

Spock realised he was frowning, and quickly re-formed his features into their usual placid expression. But he had been set wondering. It was as Jim had insisted on other occasions - the 'feel' of the ship wasn't right. It was not logical, but...

He turned away from the busy engineer to listen to the remainder of Uhura's performance. She finished to loud, enthusiastic applause, and while everyone was shouting for an encore, Spock began to thread his way back through the crowd towards Jim and McCoy. Then the music began again, a particularly lively tune. Spock suddenly found he was in the middle of the dance floor, and he did not find his progress towards the Captain and doctor at all easy - in fact, he almost had his toe trodden on several times. At least no-one asked him to dance.

And there was still one hour, ten point five minutes until midnight. He was considering making his escape before the madness of the witching hour occurred. He supposed that if they had to have midnight to celebrate at, then there was a certain convoluted logic in calculating when it would be midnight on Earth. Spock just wished he could think of some excuse not to be there when it happened. Besides, far too many of the fancy-dressed figures appeared to be armed with mistletoe for his liking.

It was when he had almost reached Kirk and McCoy that he realised how many of the crew were dressed as Bregas. Not unusual if several friends had decided to come as the same thing, of course; but Spock felt a faint suspicion. He stopped and looked closely at one of the slight, faintly feline figures. The costumes were really very good. Almost too good. Then the alien figure seemed to sense it was being watched. Hastily it shot a look at Spock out of glowing red eyes, then disappeared into the crowd. Interesting.

The thought occurred to Spock that only very thin, smaller-than-average-height crewmembers were dressed as Bregas, or... There could be another explanation. They were carrying cargo from Brega, in with a consignment picked up at the last Starbase the Enterprise had visited.

The Bregan people were an intelligent race, but unfortunately found it difficult to take a very active part in Federation life due to the fact that something in their nervous systems reacted badly with anything electronic. They were still a recent contact, and not a great deal of research had been done on the problem as yet. But it was well known that computers - indeed, electronic equipment of any kind - went haywire any time a Bregan went near. Which was why, until an answer to the problem could be found, no Bregas were allowed anywhere on a Starship, due to the potential hazard they would be.

And the cargo bay doors had short-circuited.

Notably only the interior doors. Quickly Spock returned to where the technician was completing his examination of the lighting circuitry. He took the engineer's tricorder, then went back into the milling crowd of dancers. He pointed the machine at the first person on Bregan costume he saw.

The tricorder made no sense at all; readings went right off the scale. Then the data display began to give unintelligible answers. Spock immediately marched forwards with the intention of confirming his suspicion by a physical examination. He didn't think the mask would come off.

But the Bregas gave him the slip, displaying the characteristic elusiveness and nimbleness of his race. That did it. He must tell Jim. Bregas were not violent, but their presence on the ship could cause disaster. If one of them got too close to any of the vital systems...

There were Jim and McCoy, dancing with two Andorian females. Looking at the way the doctor was hanging onto his partner's neck, Spock decided that McCoy was taking his vampire impersonation a little too far.

"Captain, I must speak with you," Spock interrupted politely.

"Not now, Spock," came the cheerful reply. "I'm dancing." Kirk was definitely enjoying himself.

"Jim - it is important." Spock was as close to exasperation as it was possible for a Vulcan to be. But something in the tone of his voice got through to Kirk.

"Okay, Spock," he said, regretfully disentangling himself from his partner. "What is it?"

"There are Bregas aboard," Spock said urgently, without preamble. "They must have stowed away in the cargo. They must be isolated before anything..."

"Spock - I thought you didn't joke!" McCoy put in delightedly.

"This is no joke. Captain, they are aboard. I have seen them."

"Come on, Spock," said Kirk swiftly, not allowing Spock to say anything about the tricorder readings. "This is a fancy dress ball." Kirk seemed faintly amused. "Really, Spock - I'm quite surprised at you!"

"But Jim..."

"Spock - I'm dancing!"

"Captain!" Spock exclaimed as forcefully as he could without actually raising his voice. But he was too late; Jim and McCoy had already disappeared into the crowd with their partners.

He was considering going after them and attempting again to convince them when he espied not one but two Bregas sneaking out of the rec room doors. Instead of closing after them, the doors remained open. Instantly Spock was off after the two figures, experiencing a lack of understanding of Human behaviour far stronger than he had known for a very long time. Surely Jim really couldn't think he'd been joking? But he hadn't been able to convince him there could well be danger to the Enterprise and everyone aboard.

So it was up to him. He fervently hoped he'd be able to find enough personnel not totally preoccupied with the festivities to organise an effective

all-decks search. New Year's Eve had a lot to answer for.

Eventually he managed to get through the jostling crowd and made his way straight to the Bridge. Stepping out of the turbolift he went immediately to the library computer station, signalling as he did so to the rising Chekov that he could keep the command chair.

Chekov didn't particularly want it; at least, he hadn't when he'd found out it was he who would have the conn while everybody else enjoyed themselves at the party. But he could see immediately from Spock's manner that this wasn't a routine visit to the Bridge; he knew the Vulcan well enough to tell that something was up. Chekov stood up and went over to where Spock was running a rapid computer scan.

"Bregas appear to have stowed away, Mr. Chekov," Spock said in reply to the Russian's unspoken question, "and are loose on the ship. As you and I appear to be the only officers not affected by the party spirit, it falls to us to locate and isolate them - quickly."

"How many of them, Mr. Spock?" Chekov asked, horrified. The Vulcan had no need to explain to him how dangerous the situation might be.

"I have no way of knowing as yet," Spock replied, grateful that someone was taking the danger seriously. "As you know, Bregas do not show up on a computer scan. All I can do is watch for areas of electronic disturbance and organise a search if enough duty personnel can be found to carry it out effectively. Please initiate a deck-to-deck search, Mr. Chekov. Call Security - and then get Mr. Sulu out of that party. He hasn't been there long enough to have become unable to take the conn while we are occupied."

Chekov went to do Spock's bidding at the communications console, with quite an evil grin on his face at that last order; he would get his own back on Sulu for pulling his leg about having to miss the party!

Even as Chekov returned to where Spock still stood looking into the library computer viewer, having completed his messages, the computer reported a malfunction in some Sickbay equipment. One of McCoy's experiments appeared to have gone unpredictably wrong.

A disgruntled Sulu, still in Samurai costume, appeared on the Bridge, but Spock and Chekov barely spared him a look; they were far too concerned with getting to Sickbay.

Spock had taken the time to get them both phasers, and as the Sickbay doors opened in front of them, his foresight was vindicated. There, on its hands and knees, inexplicably looking as if it was trying to clear away the remains of McCoy's ill-fated computer-monitored experiment, was a Bregas.

Phasers set on stun, Spock and Chekov moved carefully forward. Suddenly aware of their presence, the Bregas got to its feet, to reveal that it was slightly taller than the others Spock had seen. Strangely, this one didn't try to run.

Spock reached out and took hold of its furry chin, to prove that the mask was no mask. Unfortunately, it came off - to reveal a shocked, puzzled and extremely annoyed Christine Chapel.

"Mr. Spock!" cried the Head Nurse indignantly, as if she couldn't quite believe what had just happened. "You have ruined my costume! What are you doing? What is the meaning of this? I've a good mind to report you to Doctor McCoy - or the Captain. In fact, I think I just might! I get called away from the party - and a very good party, mind you - to clear up this mess - and I dread to think what Doctor McCoy is going to say about his experiment. And first Nurse Johnson tries to tell me I've already been here - then you come and do this! Why, Mr. Spock? I wouldn't have believed it of you!"

She left with great dignity, and an air of real puzzlement. Chapel didn't know whether to be cross or amazed that Spock was capable of such behaviour.

Spock himself was totally at a loss for words, for one of the few occasions

anyone could recall. He couldn't understand how it had happened - and he had never seen Nurse Chapel so angry. He was certainly glad Jim wasn't with him. Jim would be having hysterics by now. The thought had never crossed his mind that any of the crew might really be dressed as Bregas. Fortunately he was saved further embarrassment by the bleeping of Chekov's communicator.

"It's Engineering, Mr. Spock," reported Chekov. "Two of them have been sighted near the engines. They've already alerted Security."

Bregas near all the sensitive circuitry in Engineering could prove completely disasterous. The danger to the ship made Spock forget all about what had just happened; at least for the moment.

"Tell them we're on our way, Mr. Chekov."

\* \* \*

During his years on the Enterprise Spock had been forced to cover the distance to Engineering at ever-increasing speeds, due to one crisis or another, but this time he calculated that he and Chekov broke all previous records. They ran through the doors, phasers at the ready, to be greeted by an incredible sight. Chief Baillie and his men were there too, standing and watching. Spock had a strong suspicion Baillie was trying not to laugh.

In the middle of Engineering cowered two very frightened Bregas, clinging to each other as if that might protect them from the vision of Highland wrath which towered over them.

Montgomery Scott had chosen to go to the ball in full clan dress, complete with claymore. He made an impressive sight, and those watching were not at all surprised the little aliens were terrified. Scotty was none too pleased at having been dragged away from the party either; and he'd been even less pleased when he'd found Bregas near his precious engines.

"I'll teach ye to go near my bairns, we wee stowaways!" roared the Engineer. "And how dare ye disrupt ma Hogmanay!"

The Bregas began to whimper. Spock decided it was time to step in.

"Thank you, Mr. Scott. We'll take over from here."

Spock and Chekov herded the repentant Bregas back towards the main red deck, taking great care to ensure the little aliens went nowhere near anything electronic. The turbolift would at least operate with the Bregas inside; Spock had calculated the only malfunction they were likely to cause would be the turbolift taking them to the wrong deck. Chekov wouldn't have trusted anyone else's judgement in the matter, but he still felt extremely nervous once the doors had shut behind them. However, Spock's calculations proved correct, and although the turbolift stopped at every deck they passed, it did eventually deposit them on the right deck without serious incident.

Though they were at first very silent, by the time the turbolift had reached its correct destination the Bregas were talking incessantly in their squeaky, high-pitched voices. They evidently regarded Spock as having saved them from the Engineer, and now seemed to feel a compulsion to confess everything, in the best Federation Standard they could muster.

"We only wanted to have some fun!" protested the first Pregas apologetically. "It's miserable and boring on our planet, and no-one lets us come on your ships, so we stowed away. It's been exciting!"

"Yes," said the second one, sounding very sorry for itself. "We didn't mean to cause any trouble. But when we heard the party, we just had to join in. We were having such a good time, then you saw us," it added miserably.

Spock looked down at the two aliens disapprovingly. Yet he couldn't help feeling a slight sympathy for them, despite all the trouble they had caused, and the worse trouble they might well have brought on the ship. But any decision about what to do with them now would be up to Jim. Besides, they had yet to

catch the others. Spock gave them his best Vulcan look, and the two subsided into a meek silence.

Spock had the lights on the red deck put on; the small party entering the large room caused the dancers to stop and fall silent, one by one. Curious glances followed Spock and Chekov.

The expression on Kirk's face when they came in front of him was quite something. He looked at Spock disbelievingly and apologetically and accusingly at the same time. But Spock carefully refrained from saying 'I told you so.' Vulcans do not indulge in such comments.

McCoy, however, was clearly expecting him to say something of that nature; he appeared to be having great difficulty maintaining a straight face. As potentially dangerous as Bregas could be, they certainly never meant to cause any harm, and they always seemed to have the effect of causing Humans amusement. But then, Spock had long ago ceased expecting logic from McCoy at such times.

Clearly not wanting to desert their friends in a crisis, the remaining three Bregas detached themselves from the crowd and came and stood silently with the other two. They seemed to be completely in awe of Kirk, who was now wearing his command expression, and made no sound at all except for the odd little whimper.

Kirk couldn't help but feel sorry for the likeable little creatures, even though they had stowed away on his ship. He listened to Spock relating the list of incidents they had caused, also what they had told him; and as he considered what to do with them the Bregas finally found their tongues again and began pleading their cause pitifully. Kirk was beginning to regret that he had no choice but to have them all put in the brig.

It was McCoy who came to their rescue. He reckoned that he and Spock between them ought to be able to rig some kind of force screen to prevent the Bregas' body metabolism upsetting everything electronic they came in contact with, so they wouldn't have to spend the next few days in the brig after all. Besides, for the five days it would take them to reach the nearest Starbase, it would probably be better for all concerned if they were where everyone could keep an eye on them. Kirk had been wondering about how secure the brig would be when the little aliens had the capability of short-circuiting everything in sight if they wanted to.

But they'd still have to spend the rest of New Year's Eve in the brig. Even if Spock was inclined to begin work on the portable force-screens at that moment, McCoy was not.

Two Security guards arrived to escort the five Bregas to the brig. As soon as they'd gone, the lights went down, the music started up again, and the fancy dress ball returned to its former merriment. Spock turned to speak to Kirk, but then saw through the crowd the determined figure of Christine Chapel making her way over. She looked as if there were a few questions she wanted to ask.

What was worse, it was only five minutes to midnight. There was only one excuse Spock could think of. If we went now, he'd be able to escape all the madness of Auld Lang Syne.

"Ah... I must go, Jim. I have to go to the stores."

"The stores?"

"Yes, Jim. As this occasion happens only once a year, it is logical that I make an effort to join in."

"Put why the stores?" Kirk was beginning to smile.

"For my costume," replied Spock evenly. "As my mother is fond of saying - 'if you can't beat them, join them!'"



"Pones!" Kirk called quietly. "He's coming round."

McCoy hurried across the hushed and darkened ward, his heart pounding with hope, to where the Vulcan lay. Spock had been unconscious far too long for comfort, and McCoy had begun to despair.

A cursory examination of the tell-tales revealed nothing of significance, and the good doctor felt his raised hopes plummet.

"The readings are no different, Jim," he sighed, looking across to his friend. Who could blame Kirk for clutching at straws, building up false hopes?

Losing Spock was unthinkable...

Damn it! He cursed himself inwardly for his own inadequacy. He'd seen many men, and women for that matter, die for doing no more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Christ, too many! Now it's Spock's life on the line. One more statistic... His whole being rebelled at the thought, but there was nothing left he could do.

Kirk had hold of the Vulcan's long-fingered hand. "He's coming round. I know he is," he insisted, rising to stand at the bedside. Still clasping the lifeless hand he leaned close to the serenely calm face.

Bones felt sorry for his friend. Spock's death would hurt him terribly, perhaps irrevocably. No wonder he was rejecting the inevitable.

"Please, Jim - don't make it any worse on yourself."

But there was something in Kirk's eyes, in the stance of his body and the determined grip he held on those slender fingers that made McCoy put aside what the machinery told him and look again at the Vulcan.

As he watched the pale thin line of Spock's lips almost imperceptibly drew up into a faint smile.

Wishful thinking, he chided, but it was quite clear from the relief written on his Captain's face that Jim had seen it too. Moisture rimmed the hazel eyes, and one word of prayer formed on the trembling lips.

"...Spock..."

Hardly daring to hope, McCoy fumbled for his scanner and with numb fingers checked over the readings. "Brain activity up 2035%, pulse fluctuating, adrenaline levels..." He stammered to a halt, looking up at his friend. "Jim, it's almost as though he's trying to reach out, let us know..." His voice tailed off in relief and wonder as the implications sank in.

"Yes," whispered Kirk, pressing the tightly held Vulcan hand to his face. "He's going to be all right. He's going to be all right!"

Tears were threatening to fall from Kirk's heavy eyes, and McCoy felt a lump in his own throat too. Damn it, mustn't get too sentimental. Blasted Vulcan, worrying us all to death!

It was only his relief manifesting itself, and McCoy knew it. Quickly he set about making himself useful to avoid any more damn silly outbursts.

"I'll go tell M'Benga that his Vulcan expertise may come in useful after all. Spock'll more than likely put himself into one of those fancy healing trances before he comes round fully."

But McCoy knew his words had fallen on deaf ears as Kirk was oblivious of all but the face of his very special Vulcan. With a happy smile that lightened his heart, McCoy left the two of them together.

Kirk looked down into the olive-tinged face, seeing only perfection and beauty in every line and contour. The brief smile had faded now, but it had been enough. For a heartbeat of time Spock had summoned the strength to reach out from the black pit of unconsciousness to touch the Human's mind with a single warming thought of reassurance. That merest of touches had been enough to turn around all Kirk's hopes for the future, for until then he, like McCoy, had given in to despair. He had thought his friend's life was at an end, and with it all hope for his own.

"Spock, my Vulcan friend. Dearest Spock..."

There was hope again, and the promise of a future he'd make sure was even better than the times they had already shared. Relief had made him a little light-headed, but along with the sense of euphoria a warm, cosy feeling of love and caring settled about him like a cloak. The waiting would be bearable now, and he settled back into the chair.

\* \* \*

Spock struggled to make sense of what was happening, but there was nothing to get a firm grip on. All was black, empty, silent... nothingness.

Sensory deprivation. It dawned on him almost immediately, and with it came a stab of horror.

No - the mind controls. He still had his mind, and would use it. Think back, he commanded himself, but at first it was difficult to bring anything to mind.

The all-consuming black empty reaches refused to release their grip on him. He felt trapped in a vaccuum of nothingness, straining to elicit some sort of response, but every effort was useless.

At last occasional fragments of memory stamped themselves on his mind's eye: flashes of colour; vague shapes; people; faces; contours; but there was no logic of pattern in their forms. He concentrated hard to try and bring something into focus, until at last he realised what he was seeing.

As if re-running a film taken through the camera of his own eyes he now saw the Bridge of the Enterprise. From his station at the science console he looked out towards the viewscreen which displayed an image of what the sensors had defined as some sort of energy field. The screen, though, revealed nothing but the regular star patterns.

Events were moving on, and Doctor McCoy entered the Bridge to stand beside the Captain's chair. The image moved and blurred a little until it settled again on the read-out from the sensor scans. Spock realised he was looking down the hooded viewer of his console. The image moved again, and this time came to rest on the face of his Captain. Kirk had turned to request information, a request Spock suddenly realised he could not fulfill. He remembered what had happened.

The strange energy source had enveloped the ship, but more surely enveloped him. With blinding speed he had been swallowed up in a maelstrom of psychic energy. It pressed in on him from all sides, inside and out, sending out searing stabs into the very core of his consciousness. As a desperate act of self-preservation his natural instincts slammed shut all the barriers to his mind. Total withdrawal...

Black emptiness returned. He now knew he was a prisoner in the almost infinite confines of his own mind. He had somehow to reach back to reality, find some way out through the unchanging, unyielding void; but how? And what was his guarantee that he wouldn't find himself once more in the grip of the churning, oppressive psychic force? He didn't even know how much time had elapsed - or indeed if any time at all had gone by. What was he to do?

Through his rising panic one clear thought manifested itself in his mind. Jim... With a certainty born out of a trust and friendship that had conquered

more than the barriers of race and culture he knew that Jim would be by his side. The certainty of that one fact grew in his mind until it seemed as though it filled the blackness with warmth and melted away his panic and fear, to leave a sense of calm and hope.

He gathered the feeling of warmth about him, concentrating it into one single thought, one solitary word that grew in his mind, building in intensity, gathering all the energy he could muster, until it shattered out into the void, splintering into a myriad of sparkling, glinting pieces that penetrated his mental barriers and sped on out into the real world.

Tiny pinpricks of sensation filtered back into his consciousness, but the effort put into that one mental cry for help had left him exhausted. The most he could do was allow the sensations to wash over him, unable to analyse or define. He knew he had reached Kirk, though, for another single word had begun to fill his rapidly cooling mind.

//Spock...//

And he knew he was safe. Tiredness claimed him.

A decorative border consisting of a repeating pattern of small black five-pointed stars arranged in a grid-like fashion, creating a scalloped or wavy effect along the edges of the page.

## TO HELP A FRIEND

Karen Hayden

What did I intend to say to you  
Whilst deep in the plak tow?  
What could I say?  
For you had been rejected  
More completely than at any other time before  
And by your own kind, too.

"Spock..." I cried...  
But how could I hope to help you cope  
With the fever and the pain?  
T'Pau stepped between us  
With her words of warning,  
And I had to succumb to her logic,  
Despite what I wanted to do...

I wanted to hold you close,  
To tell you how important you were to me,  
To reassure you that as you had said  
'My closest friend' to me before beamdown,  
I, too, felt that there was none closer  
Than you to me.

I wanted to help you through what you now had to face. But I could not do what I wanted to.

I had to stand by circumstance,  
And succumb to Tradition,  
And the laws and customs of your people,  
And keep the pain I felt for you  
Deep within my hidden soul.  
For your sake - and for the sake of appe-

But I vowed that later,  
No matter what happened here on Vulcan,  
I would tell you  
Just how important you are to me, and how much I care,  
And that what 'they' thought of you  
Should not - and DID NOT - matter...

(Inspired by 'Amok Time')

A decorative border consisting of a repeating pattern of small, stylized floral or star-like motifs arranged in a grid-like fashion, creating a scalloped or wavy effect along the edges.

IS THERE CAUSE TO DOUBT?

Six-year-old Spock left I-Chaya the sehlat and walked towards the house. The sun blazed down on its west side, where all the shutters were closed against the harsh glare. He looked at the windows of his mother's room, his thoughts confused and worried.

The paintwork on the shutters had blistered through time in the fierce heat, and he idly picked at it with his fingernail.

"Spock! Come here at once!" the stern voice ordered.

Spock obeyed, leaving a bare patch on the paintwork.

T'Pau, his grandmother, looked disapprovingly at him, towering over the little Vulcan. "What were you doing?" she asked sternly. "Vulcans do not peep through windows."

"I was not... The shutters are closed on the west side. Grandmother, may I speak...?"

"No, you may not speak to your mother. She is ill and must not be disturbed." T'Pau cut him short. "Do not ask again."

Spock did not like the feeling which came over him as he entered the main lounge. How empty and lonely the house seemed now! For some mysterious reason his grandmother had suddenly appeared and told him she would be staying for a while. How strange it felt to be suddenly shut out and to feel unwanted! He had not seen his parents for three days now. T'Pau had turned down all his requests to speak to Amanda. She stood there, barring his way and looking down here nose at him -- or so it had seemed to the little Vulcan. Spock did not like this stern imposing woman, even if she was his grandmother.

"No!" She turned him away from the hallway. "Your mother requires quietness while she is ill. Humans are not like us."

Somehow, within himself, Spock thought that she was not telling him the truth. He knew he dared not question her, but then... Vulcans were supposed to be incapable of lying...

It was a confused Spock who sat in the main lounge pretending to read a book. He missed his mother's presence; she always exuded a warm comforting feeling around the house. It was not logical, but he missed her smiling personality and her laughing voice, which she could not disguise.

What if she should die? The thought raced through Spock's confused brain. He realised that he could not even contemplate the thought of losing his mother...

"Where are you going?" T'Pau came from nowhere. Obviously she had picked up his thought-waves and knew his intentions. "I have never understood you, Spock," she continued. "You will not take no for an answer. It is your Human half which is responsible for your illogical feelings and actions."

Spock turned away from the stern figure and went out into the garden once more. The atmosphere in the house was oppressive. He had to get out somehow...

He knew that his grandmother wanted him out of the house anyway; at least she would not have to follow him like a shadow and keep a watch on him all the time. He began to walk towards the gateway and the street, I-Chaya at his heels. The heat shimmered from the walkways as it was almost midday, the sun a fierce ball overhead. Spock walked on through the streets of Shi-Kahr until he left the buildings behind and stood on the edge of the desert.

Here he always found a great sense of peace; the rugged beauty of the area never failed to bring a sense of calm whenever his young mind was troubled. He came here for solitude, and a chance to think over and reflect on many things.

I-Chaya lay down at his feet, not moving as his young friend gazed out towards the black I-Langon mountains which towered in the far distance.

\* \* \*

I-Chay lifted his head and growled, his fur bristling as he heard the scream of a Le-Matya in the far-off distance. Spock heard it too; the sound never failed to send a shiver through him. He was always being reprimanded by his father for allowing sensations like this to affect him. Do not touch... Do not cry... Do not show emotion... How many times had he been told that? Both sides of him were in eternal conflict.

The afternoon wore on into late evening, the shadows lengthened. Still Spock lingered, his thoughts becoming calmer as time passed. The air cooled a little as the fiery sun slipped below the horizon. I-Chaya whined and nudged at Spock with his nose, reminding his little friend that darkness was falling at a rapid pace, and that the Forge was no place to be during nightfall. Spock did not heed, and sat there, staring up into the darkened sky with its millions of stars, eyes wide. I-Chaya sighed deeply and rested his great head on his paws, heeding the sounds around him for signs of anything which would mean approaching danger.

Some time later he lifted his head and growled, hackles rising. The growl changed to a deep snarl.

"What is it, I-Chaya?" Spock touched the furry head and looked in the direction the sehlat sensed danger. He saw approaching lights, and heard the whine of an aircar's engine.

The aircar flew over them, then turned and landed a short distance away. T'Pau stepped out, followed by his grandfather.

"Why have you done this?" T'Pau seemed extremely displeased. "Staying out on the Forge until after nightfall. Come." She led him towards the waiting aircar.

They did not speak on the short journey back to Shi-Kahr. Spock was glad to see that his grandfather parked the aircar and followed them into the house. That meant he was staying too.

T'Pau sent Spock to tidy himself after the sand on his clothes left a trail behind him in the house. He came downstairs again, dressed in fresh clothing.

Suval looked up as he entered the room. "Come here, Spock." He made a sign for him to be seated. "Leave us," he said to T'Pau, who obeyed without question.

Spock looked at his grandfather for a long time; the wise old eyes showed his long years of knowledge and wisdom. At last Suval broke the silence.

"Spock, why did you go off on your own today? When darkness fell T'Pau became concerned for your safety."

"My... mind was troubled, Grandfather. I sought the seclusion of the Sas-a-Shar desert..."

"A troubled mind in one so young? Tell me," Suval commanded quietly, knowing already the reason for his young grandson's worries.

"My mother... she is ill, and Grandmother will not allow me to see her or even speak to her. Is it something so serious that... that... I do not wish my mother to die. I have not seen my parents for three days now. Why do you keep turning me away? I do not understand."

"I know the reason for your concern, Spock," Suval stated quietly. "You need have no fears regarding Amanda's recovery. Her illness is not serious. However, Humans cannot enter a healing trance, and your father has brought it about through the bond which links your parents' minds. That is the reason for keeping you from their presence and preventing you from creating an interruption

which would cause the link to be broken. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Grandfather." Spock still looked worried.

"Amanda will be well soon." Suval read his thoughts. "Perhaps you will see her tomorrow."

"Yes, Grandfather." Spock still looked worried, but did not question further.

\* \* \*

Next morning the sound of the departing aircar woke him early. His grandparents had gone home. That meant...

Spock dressed quickly and rushed downstairs to find Amanda preparing breakfast in the kitchen. She looked pale, and there were dark shadows under her eyes, but she smiled as the little figure came charging through the doorway. A Vulcan running. Most unusual...

"Mother..."

Spock did not resist as she put her arms around him and hugged him to her.

"I hear you were worried about me?"

"Yes... I... You just went away without telling me..."

"It's all right. I had a Human complaint, nothing very serious. Sarek and I mind-linked and he helped me to recover by putting me into a healing trance." Amanda patted his shoulder. "Grandmother came to look after you until I was well again."

"Where is Father?"

"He is resting. The effort of maintaining the mind-link put a very great strain on him. I want you to be very quiet and not disturb him."

"Yes, Mother." Spock sat down at the table, his eyes following Amanda's every movement.

How good it felt to have the house back to normal once more...

\* \* \* \* \*

#### THE KAHS-WAN

"Tomorrow is your Kahs-wan, the maturity test," Sarek informed Spock. "You know what is required of you?"

"Yes, Father. I must survive for seven days without food, water or weapons on Vulcan's Forge."

"You will not fail me. Your intelligence is higher than that of the average seven-year-old Vulcan. Rest now, Spock. We leave at first light."

Spock lay on his bead staring up at the ceiling, unable to sleep. Anxiety and fears about the coming ordeal crowded his troubled mind. He must not fail the Kahs-wan. It was no disgrace to fail... but not for him. People would brand him a cowardly Human for the rest of his life.

Sarek has faith in me. I am a Vulcan. I can do it.

The fears vanished, and Spock felt a great sense of peace come over him. "I will do it," he said softly, descending into sleep.

\* \* \*

Sarek woke him at four am. It was still dark as father and son ate a last breakfast together. Spock was dressed in a Vulcan desert soft-suit and boots, the only equipment he was allowed. Food and water he would have to find for himself, a fearsome task in the wild barren area of the Forge.

"Come. It is time."

Spock got up and followed his father to the aircar. Dawn was breaking as they left the city of Shi-Kahr behind and flew out over the desert, mile after mile. Spock was silent as the aircar descended and stopped.

"Farewell, Spock." Sarek raised his hand in the Vulcan salute. "Until the seventh day. I trust you."

"I will not fail you, Father." Spock returned the hand sign. "Farewell."

He watched as the aircar rose and was lost to sight. He was alone...

The area seemed even more desolate, sand stretching for miles as far as the eye could see. Already the heat-shimmer distorted the surroundings, and the hot sun was melting the last frost remaining on the rocks after the cold desert night. Three miles distant towered the L-Langon mountain range, black and forbidding, the knife-edged jagged peaks clawing at the sky.

Spock turned and started walking towards the mountains, keeping his eyes on the ground as he walked, watching for the carnivorous Takal plant whose creeping tendrils lay concealed under the sand, waiting to twine themselves around the legs of an unwary traveller. Vulcan's Forge was full of dangers. In the distance Spock could hear the scream of a Le-Matya, which made its home in the mountains, as did other wild creatures. Spock was prepared to risk an encounter as the mountains offered the only chance of shelter both from the blazing heat of the day and the freezing cold of the desert night.

The sun grew hotter as it climbed the cloudless red sky, colouring the snow-capped peaks and reflecting from the ice. At last Spock reached the foothills and sat down to rest for a while after the long walk.

This is a wild, barren area, he thought to himself. The first thing I have to do is find shelter. He shaded his eyes, looking towards the mountain slopes. His keen eyesight alighted on a shadowy patch, darker than the rest of the mountain side. It looked promising.

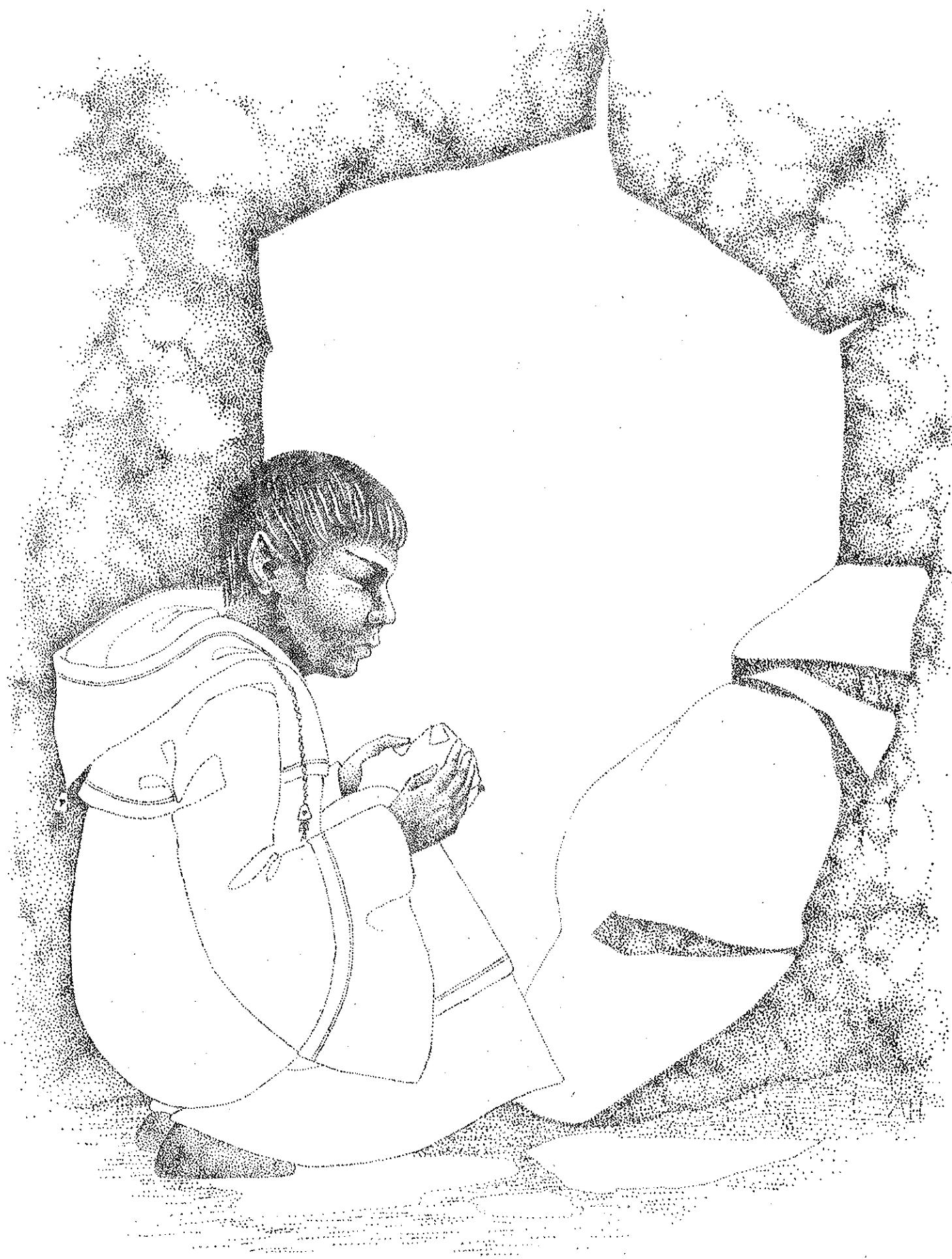
After resting for a time, Spock climbed the steep slope leading to the place he had seen from below. It was a small opening; in the overhang of rock. Logic told him to approach with caution; he picked up some stones, hurling them through the entrance to the cave in case it contained any predators.

Silence. Spock waited a few moments before entering through the narrow opening. He found himself in a small cavern, pitch dark after the bright sunlight outside. Slowly he felt his way around the walls, once striking his head on a projection of rock; when his eyes adjusted to the darkness he saw that the cavern was small, with a downward sloping roof. At least it would bar any large predators.

Shelter. The next problems were water and food, in that order. Some sparse vegetation grew at the foot of the slope among the rocks. Spock found it to be inedible, razor sharp blades that speared their way forward among spiky leaves. Carefully avoiding it, he walked a little further, climbing over some rocks which barred his path.

On the far side, where the rocks ended, he found some cactus-like plants. He knew they were non-poisonous and contained moisture; the problem was how to get it out, since formidable spines covered the plant like daggers. Spock thought about it for a moment, his eyes searching the ground. He picked up a large flat stone and struck the plant with it until pieces broke off. Very carefully he extracted the spines and sucked the liquid from the planet. It tasted bitter and acrid, but at least it exuded moisture of a kind. Before leaving he broke off more pieces to store until another water supply could be found.

By now the fiery blazing sun was almost overhead. Spock had already burned his hand on one of the sun-baked rocks. The smaller rocks lay as rubble further down the slope, having cracked and split through time in the



fearsome heat. Spock made his way back to the cave and slept during the greatest heat of the day.

The sun was almost setting when he awoke, the searing heat abating a little as the air cooled. Spock sat up, feeling the first pangs of hunger. He left the cave in search of a food source.

The task seemed impossible, the sparse vegetation unfit for consumption in one way or another. He travelled a long distance from the cave in his search, finding only two small plants, barely enough to satisfy his hunger. The sun sank even lower in the sky. Spock abandoned the search and turned in the direction of the cave; he had to reach it before nightfall.

Sleep came intermittently. The unyielding floor was hard, and he shivered in the freezing cold of the desert night. Hoar frost formed on the walls of the cave as the temperature dropped, the cold vapour filling the enclosed space with a fine mist. The ice forming on the porous rock produced a reaction, allowing an odorous chemical to seep through. Gas-like, it swirled around, until gradually the cave filled with the substance. Spock woke with a start, choking and struggling for breath. He managed to crawl through the narrow entrance before collapsing.

The new day dawned before consciousness returned. Spock sat up, trying to clear the waves of dizziness which swept over him. He felt very strange, and his head hurt as thoughts and impressions crowded into his confused mind, all fighting for a place. Frightened now, Spock realised they were not his own. Somehow he was receiving the thoughts of another Vulcan.

"This cannot be," he said aloud. "My telepathic powers are not fully developed - but I am in contact with others..."

He remained where he was, sitting at the entrance to the cave, amazed by this new experience. How it had come about he did not know; he accepted the fact that his powers suddenly had become those of an adult Vulcan. He concentrated hard, willing his thoughts outward until he made contact.

//May I link with thee?// he asked.

Back came the answer. //You may. Who are you, fellow Vulcan?//

//I am called Spock.//

//I am called Sirak.// The older Vulcan recognised Spock as a young Vulcan experimenting with his telepathic powers. //Peace and long life, Spock of Vulcan.//

Sirak was nearing the end of his life-span, and he proceeded to give Spock the logic and wisdom acquired through the long years of his eventful life as a Vulcan Elder. Spock listened in fascination to Sirak's teachings.

//I must withdraw. I grow fatigued.// The link weakened. //Heed the logic in my advice. May you travle far on the path of life. Live long and prosper, young Spock. Farewell...//

The mind contact faded, and Spock was alone again. He sat quietly, filled with wonder at this new experience, his mind at peace after the link with the wise Vulcan Elder and his logical mind. An hour passed, then two. Spock still sat there, his hunger and thirst forgotten. He decided to try again, and composed himself for another attempt. This time contact was elusive, the other Vulcan having a mind-barrier which forbade entry. Spock did not know to turn back, his inexperience making him persist.

//May I have permission to link with thee?// he asked again.

Suddenly the barriers were removed, and Spock recoiled at the flood of irrational illogic radiating from the other Vulcan. Spock was engulfed in a searing flame as if an inferno raged within.

//Why do you seek contact?// the harsh mind-voice demanded.

//I... ask forgiveness,// Spock managed to reply through the sea of flame. //This is my first experience of a mind-contact, and...//

//So! You are a young Vulcan, and an inexperienced, illogical one. This link will teach you not to cross a mind barrier.//

//Please, let me go...// Spock tried to break the link, but the other Vulcan was too strong. //You are hurting me...//

//How old are you? Your voice seems very young.//

//I am seven.//

//Indeed? Then you tamper with matters far beyond your years and understanding. Begone!//

Violently the link was broken, throwing Spock to the ground. He lay there for a while, his mind in turmoil and reeling from the terrible experience. A long time passed before the shattering effects wore off and his mind returned to normal.

Realising he was thirsty, he crawled back into the cave and the store of cactus. They did not contain much moisture now, drying up as they did in the heat. The store would have to be replenished.

His thirst quenched for the time being, Spock became aware of his raging hunger. He set out in another food-hunting expedition, this time travelling in the opposite direction. Some miles away he discovered a fertile valley where plant life grew in abundance, including some berries and a hard-shelled fruit which he knew held a drinkable liquid. He ate his fill and then collected a supply to take back to the cave.

"I shall spend the night there. It is only logical to move here where the food supply is, so tomorrow I shall leave the cave and base myself here."

The light began to fade as he reached 'home'. Sitting down at the entrance he watched the setting sun transform Vulcan's Forge into a place of strange beauty, colouring the barren rocks a soft shade of pink and blue. The sky changed from red to orange, and then to deep pink as the fiery ball slipped below the horizon. Darkness fell like a curtain; on Vulcan the twilight was short.

Spock still lingered on, deep in thought, his mind once again going over the remarkable events of the day. Somehow his heightened powers had lessened; no longer did the thoughts of others come into his head, and try as he might he failed to project his own thoughts.

"I can't do it now!" He gave up the attempt.

Sleep would not come that night. Spock's body was tired, but his mind too active. Again he pondered over the second link with the irrational Vulcan.

"I do not understand. I shall inform Father on my return. He will explain to me." Spock remained awake, the ice beginning to form on the walls once more as the temperature dropped.

This time Spock was awake as the vapour seeped through the cave and swirled around the cave like tendrils of fog. A wave of dizziness swept over him, and he struggled to breathe. It was as before. He crawled towards the opening, drawing in lungfuls of the clear night air, aware of the thoughts and impressions crowding his mind, gradually fading away as his mind and senses cleared in the fresh air. Shaken by the experience, he turned to see the fingers of mist drifting from the cave.

"I was asleep the last time, and inhaled a lot of that vapour. It must have been the cause of what happened to me. It must contain something dangerous."

He moved away from the cave and spent the rest of the night in the open. He did not sleep, keeping watch for predators that prowled the Vulcan night.

The sun rose on another new day. Spock looked up at the cave, deciding to investigate further into its mysterious secret. The mist did not drift from the cave now. He hesitated, sniffing the air, but could detect nothing. Ready to back out and run at any sign of danger, he advanced with caution. All was still. Using a sharp stone he managed to chip a piece from the cave wall, stowing it away in the pouch of his desert suit.

"Father can have this analysed at the Science Academy. Whatever happens to this rock takes place at night, when the temperature drops."

Leaving the cave, he set out towards the fertile valley. Nearing the end of the journey he turned quickly on hearing the sound of a deep growl. A snarling wolf-like creature sprang from the rocks, hurling itself upon him.

Spock instinctively threw up his arm to protect his face, and could not help a cry of pain as the creature's fearsome claws raked his shoulder. The impact of the heavy body threw him to the ground, the snarling raging beast on top of him. Spock fought hard to keep the bared teeth away from his throat. He managed to clamp one hand around the beast's muzzle, the other searching for the pressure point in the thick furry neck. Finding it, his fingers squeezed...

The beast's eyes glazed and it fell over unconscious on top of Spock. He managed to crawl out from under the heavy body. Pain stabbed at his shoulder as he hurriedly left the scene; the creature was only stunned, and he did not want to be around when it regained consciousness. He forced himself onward, not stopping until he had reached the safety of the valley.

Very carefully Spock removed the bloodstained material from his shoulder to survey the damage. He drew a sharp breath as he saw the long jagged gash running from shoulder to elbow. Fortunately it had stopped bleeding now, and he gathered some soft leaves to act as a padding between the wound and the material of his desert suit. The arrangement was primitive, but it would have to suffice.

Having been up all of the previous night, he lay down in the shade and fell asleep. The arm throbbed with a dull ache when he awoke and tried to sit up. He forced himself to eat some of the fruit, then considered what he would do next.

"Tomorrow is the fourth day. If I start travelling tonight, and rest during the greatest heat of the day, it should take me the remaining length of time to cross the Sas-a-Shar..."

The rest of the time was spent in preparation. Spock gathered fronds from a giant tree-like plant and bound them together to make a carry-bag. It was difficult due to his injured arm, as the fronds kept slipping, but at last the task was complete. He filled the bag with an assortment of fruit, paying more attention to the hard-shelled variety containing the drinkable liquid.

He then set about constructing a weapon, binding a hard flinty stone to a tubular stem from one of the plants. The flint he sharpened with another stone until it became razor-edged. A crude weapon, but effective.

He rested until nightfall, then started off on the perilous journey, the stars giving enough light to see by. He covered a good distance on the first night, despite the injured arm. When daylight came he forced himself to keep going until he found some shelter. It was only a huge rock, but he lay down on its shady side and fell asleep.

He woke in the evening with a raging thirst, his shoulder and arm burning like fire, so painful he could hardly move them. Spock knew he was running a fever. He drank the liquid from one of the fruits, but it did nothing to dispel the raging thirst.

Despite all the discomforts he forced himself on when darkness came, the now useless left arm hanging at his side. The injury and fever forced him to rest several times during the night's travel. By the time dawn came he could go no further, and lay down in the sand.

The searing heat brought him to wakefulness several hours later. Spock opened his eyes and tried to sit up, with some difficulty as the sand seemed to rise up in waves to meet him. He knew he was delirious; through the heat-shimmer he thought he saw the greenery of an oasis. Whether it was a mirage or due to his delirium, he could not be sure. Perhaps it was real... Slowly he walked towards it, weaving an erratic path through the sand, the fever affecting his sense of balance.

The scenes was no illusion. Spock had found one of the very few oases in the Sas-a-Sahr desert. Gratefully he sank down beside the pool of water and drank his fill. He splashed the cool water over his burning face; it did as he had hoped, helping to refresh him a little and clear his senses.

After resting for a moment, Spock removed the dressing on his injured arm for the first time. He recoiled in horror at the sight - the edges of the wound puffy and discoloured, green streaks spreading out in all directions. He knew his arm was poinsoned, and knew also that he could not reach Shi-Kahr and medical facilities in time - the distance was too great.

"Father trusted me. I have failed him..."

But the Vulcan half refused to give in. Through Spock's fever-clouded brain came the message, "The water... The water..." So there was something about that water - but what? His confused mind refused to function. Finally the answer came. Spock remembered that the water had a faint metallic taste which meant it contained minerals.

He removed his clothing and waded out into the pool until it was deep enough to immerse the injured shoulder. He repeated this at frequent intervals, forcing himself to stay in the water longer each time. Slowly the wound began to respond to the treatment, the pain and swelling lessening.

The fever left him weak. He did not have the strength to continue the journey. Among the trees of the oasis it was shady and cool; Spock slept deeply for the first time since the attack. He woke feeling refreshed, his head clear. The fever had gone.

For the remainder of the day he rested, deciding to continue the journey at nightfall.

The remaining days were spent like this, travelling by night and resting during the great heat of the day. Spock pressed on until at dawn on the seventh day he saw the city of Shi-Kahr in the distance.

\* \* \*

Sarek and Amanda stood at the edge of the desert, staring out over the hot barren sand, the rising wind driving the stinging particles into their faces.

"He approaches." Sarek's keen eyesight caught the little figure in the far-off distance.

"Where, Sarek? Can you really see him?" Amanda fought to control her excitement. She caught her breath as the thin little figure came nearer, his desert suit dirty and torn.

"Welcome, my son. You have withstood the Kahr-wan with honour," Sarek said gravely. "You did not fail me."

Unable to contain herself any longer, Amanda knelt down and embraced her son. She drew back in alarm as he winced when she touched his shoulder.

"You have hurt yourself!"

"I was attacked by a V-Khrass in the mountains. It wounded me with its claw."

"We shall see to it at home. Come." Sarek indicated the waiting aircar.

Spock was never so glad to see his home again. At once he attended to

matters of hygiene, getting rid of the soiled desert suit. The warm water from the shower felt so good that he was reluctant to leave it. He had to when Sarek entered the room.

"Spock, I wish to examine the wound on your shoulder." Sarek raised one eyebrow at the sight of the long, half-healed gash. Spock told his father all about it as Sarek applied the proper dressing.

"You acted logically. The mineral springs of the oases have healing properties." Sarek fastened the dressing in place.

"Father... I have many questions."

"Later, Spock. Come, you must be hungry. Amanda has prepared a meal."

Spock ate ravenously. Amanda watched in amusement as he helped himself from the different dishes on the table. At last he sat back, replete.

"Come." Sarek rose and led the way to his study. "Do not disturb us. We have much to discuss."

Amanda nodded and began to clear the table. She knew this would be a long session between her husband and son. She would not disturb them, even if they stayed up all night.

"Father, I made an interesting discovery in the L-Langon Mountains." Spock produced the rock he had chipped from the cave wall. He proceeded to tell Sarek the whole story.

"You have done well, Spock. This contains a substance which heightens the senses, a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands. I will have this analysed at the Science Academy."

"The first link was with a Vulcan Elder." Spock continued his story. "He gave me good advice on Vulcan philosophy. The second link... well... I..." He hesitated, obviously reluctant to continue any further. "I did not understand..."

"Tell me. I sense you have had a bad experience and are reluctant to talk about it." Sarek looked at his son. "I will explain if I can."

"I crossed a mind barrier..."

"Indeed?" Sarek interrupted, his eyebrows raised. "Continue."

"Well, the Vulcan was irrational and illogical. He was engulfed in flame and transmitted it to me through the link. He was hurting me, and would not let me go."

"What did he say to you?" Sarek's face was grave.

"He... asked me how old I was, then spoke severely, telling me I was interfering with matters beyond my years of understanding. The separation threw me to the ground. What did he mean, Father?"

Silence fell. Sarek looked at Spock waiting for an explanation. He wondered what he could tell him, and how much. After all, his son was only seven.

"Spock, you are very young. What I am about to tell you should be explained when you are older. You linked with a Vulcan in Pon Farr."

A look of bewilderment came to Spock's face. "What? I do not understand."

"I did not expect you to understand." Sarek went on to explain to Spock logically and clearly, giving only the basic facts. "That is all I can tell you, Spock. Your mind is too young to understand further. We will discuss this again when the time is correct. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Father, but..."

"No questions, Spock. I cannot answer. Do not speak of this to anyone. Vulcans do not discuss this subject among themselves."

"Yes, Father."

"Come. The hour is late, and you are tired."

Spock went to his room, looking at the familiar surroundings. How good it felt to lie down on his own bed after a week of sleeping on the ground! That was his last conscious thought before sleep claimed him.

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Sarek had the rock sample analysed at the Science Academy. It did contain a chemical which heightened the senses. The Academy sent a team of researchers to the L-Langon Mountains. The Chief Scientist presented Spock with a commendation on his discovery and a certificate of entry into the Science Academy on reaching the age of eighteen.

"This is something to show those taunting schoolmates!" Spock thought to himself. "I have passed the Kahs-wan with honour, and have assisted science. Sassak failed the Kahs-wan, as did some others in my class at school. I am more Vulcan than they are..."

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## MIND MELD

Sheena Ann Brown

My mind is yours  
as is my will.  
You touch my soul  
and time stands still.  
You feel my emotion  
like falling rain;  
I feel it returned  
as undoubled pain.  
You remember Amanda.  
I understand.  
All that you are  
was carefully planned.  
You do feel emotion.  
I feel you cry.  
You try hard to conceal it  
From my Human eye.  
On my word of honour  
these things that I see  
will always remain  
solely with me.  
But I can't help but question  
the way that you are -  
Human and Vulcan  
always at war.  
So... I question  
your love  
as your thoughts become dim,  
and as you release me  
I see only... Jim.

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\*\*\* \*\*  
 NO CHOICE  
 by  
 Alinda Alain

"No! NO!"

Kirk awoke with a start and sat up to stare in stunned disbelief at the sight that greeted his sleep-filled eyes.

"Spock! Spock? Is that you? What are you doing in my quarters at this hour?" The Human reached out and turned up the lights. The Vulcan stood over him.

"Mr. Spock, are you ill?" The Captain rose to his feet, his hands going to the slender shoulders.

"No." The Vulcan's voice was a strangled whisper. "No, I am not ill. Put... you..." The dark eyes focused on his face with an intense, searching expression.

"I'm fine," Kirk said, his expression one of utter puzzlement. "Any reason why I shouldn't be?"

The slender shoulders beneath his hands seemed to lose their slump and tension, relaxing, straightening. And the dark eyes suddenly lost their openness, becoming veiled and guarded as was their norm.

"I am sorry to have disturbed your sleep, Captain," Spock said with quiet formality. "If you will excuse me, I will withdraw."

With a swift, fluid ease and strength that was gentle but firm, Spock freed himself from his Captain's hands and moved towards the door.

"Mr. Spock," came a bemused voice from behind him.

The Vulcan stopped but did not turn.

"Am I to understand that you intend just to walk in and out of here without one word of explanation?"

"Yes, Captain," Spock said softly, and stepped through the door.

\* \* \*

Spock re-entered his quarters to find the silver-robed figure waiting for him.

"Well, Mr. Spock?" the being asked.

"It is unworthy of your intellect to force me to cooperate by threatening him," the Vulcan said coldly.

"I was not threatening him, merely demonstrating how convincing and total our powers of illusion still are, since you had expressed doubts about our ability to carry out our plans."

Spock turned and walked away, his hands clenching into fists at his side. "What you ask... What you want is of a me of long ago."

"Only sixteen of your years, Mr. Spock," the being reminded.

"I am not that person any longer," the Vulcan said fiercely.

"True. But the loyalty, respect and obligation are still there. He did, after all, make your adjustment among Humans more bearable, acceptable."

"Yes."

"For which you are deeply grateful. Had he not done so you would have returned to Vulcan long before the you of today could have come into being, long before you would have met Captain James T. Kirk."

Spock turned, his dark eyes filled with an expression of anger, betrayal.

"You have no right to read my deepest thoughts, Keeper."

The being, a Talosian, smiled, now sure of its triumph. "They are not as deep as you think, Spock of Vulcan. Will you help us?"

Spock held himself rigid, but the surrender in his dark eyes was clear. "I have no choice," he said bleakly.

\* \* \*

"Good morning, Mr. Spock," Captain Kirk greeted from a table in the officers' mess room.

"Captain. Doctor McCoy," the Vulcan said, picking up his tray.

"Aren't you going to join us, Spock?" McCoy asked.

With obvious reluctance the Vulcan came to sit with them. They ate in silence for several minutes, Kirk giving Spock an occasional curious glance. On his part, Spock kept his attention on his food. McCoy, always the perceptive one, especially where these two were concerned, looked from one to the other.

"You two have a disagreement or something?" he asked mildly.

Spock stiffened, but did not look up.

Kirk, sensing his First Officer's unease, looked at the doctor and shook his head warningly. With a shrug, McCoy returned to his meal.

After a time Spock seemed to relax, and soon thereafter the Captain and First Officer left, walking side by side.

"Did you sleep well last night, Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked conversationally.

"Sleep? Yes, Captain, I slept last night." The Vulcan seemed preoccupied.

Kirk could not help giving him a sideways glance as they walked down the corridor and entered the turbolift. "Bridge," the Captain ordered.

The turbolift moved obediently.

\* \* \*

"Our plan will begin in four more of your days," the Keeper announced.

Spock lifted his dark head from the bowed position it had assumed during his meditation alone in his quarters, having been off duty for two hours.

"No. I cannot," the Vulcan said.

The Talosian seemed to sigh in exasperation. "You will have to do it, Mr. Spock. He can live out the rest of his life with us. You know what we can do for him. We will help him."

"I cannot," Spock repeated. "Talos is forbidden. To go there is to incur the death penalty."

"With our powers we can protect you."

After several seconds of wishful resistance, Spock allowed himself to consider the Talosian's plan. He had only recently learned of the crippling tragedy that had befallen his former Captain, Christopher Pike. The Talosians were right. Talos IV and the Talosians' power of illusion was the only chance Captain Pike would have to live out the remainder of his life unhampered by the useless body the accident had left the Human with.

"I will need a vessel. The fastest possible. The quicker we arrive at Talos IV, the less danger there will be of being stopped by Starfleet. Also, the less taxation upon your powers over such a distance," Spock said finally.

"The Enterprise will be that vessel."

"No!" Spock refused immediately, emphatically. "Jim... Captain Kirk would not..." Spock stopped, marshalling his arguments. "Your powers of

illusion are exceptional and great, but your race is dying and this illusion will be done lightyears from Talos IV. You may tire or falter. Captain Kirk is extremely perceptive. Nothing less than absolute perfection will deceive him."

"We will not tire or falter."

"If you fail in any way, Captain Kirk will be left open to court martial - and the death penalty."

"We will not fail," the Talosian assured him again.

"Captain Kirk must know nothing of this," Spock said firmly. "Another vessel must be used. Not the Enterprise."

"We have to. It is the logical choice. Do not fear for your Captain. We will take care of him."

Spock stiffened, not liking the Talosian's words.

\* \* \*

Kirk waited worriedly, wondering why it was taking three summons for Spock to answer.

"Yes... come."

The door slid aside and Kirk entered to find his First Officer standing, and atmosphere of tension permeating the room.

"Captain," the Vulcan greeted him formally.

Kirk received the distinct impression that he was not welcome here, or that he had intruded on something.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but I just wanted to confirm our chess game this evening."

Spock's wing-swept eyebrows lifted. "Our chess game," he repeated quietly.

Kirk frowned. "Spock. What's wrong with you? You've been acting odd since the night before last when I found you in my room. I'm sorry, but my curiosity has about reached its limit."

The Vulcan took a deep breath. "Captain, there are some matters which are... private."

Hazel eyes widened, searching. "Oh... I see," the Human said after a moment, realising once again that this man was, after all, part alien - a fact he sometimes forgot as he and Spock became better acquainted. He turned to leave.

"Captain..."

He paused, glancing back.

"I will meet you in the rec room in two point five hours for our chess game."

Kirk's smile was immediate and warm. "It's a date, Mr. Spock." He left.

\* \* \*

"We will not harm him, Mr. Spock, nor allow him to come to harm," the Talosian reassured, reappearing at the Human's departure.

"Captain Kirk's strength of will is considerable, especially where the Enterprise is concerned," Spock emphasised. "A considerable amount of your illusionary powers would be needed on him alone."

The Talosian was silent a moment, seeming to study the Vulcan intently. "Understood, Mr. Spock. It can be done. And, if I am not mistaken, there is

a way by which we can... distract Captain Kirk sufficiently to keep him from realising and resisting our illusions and trying to regain control of his ship too soon."

"How?" Spock asked, apprehension building in him like a tidal wave.

"By creating a danger to you, Mr. Spock. The very danger you fear for him... a court martial and the death penalty."

Spock took a deep shuddering breath and shook his head. "No..." he began, but the Talosian interrupted.

"It is decided, Mr. Spock," the talosian said firmly. "We wish to have Captain Pike here with us, even as you want it for him. We have given you a plan from your own mind that cannot fail. It will be done."

Spock said nothing, seeming resigned, but there was resistance in his mind and body.

"It is for the best," the Talosian reminded him. "Captain Pike, too, will eventually want this. And your Starfleet Command will not be unreasonable."

Still the Talosian sensed Spock's resistance.

"If you truly do not wish to help us willingly, we can use our powers of illusion even upon you." The Talosian paused for emphasis. "Or we can go to Captain Kirk and present him with the plan and the only hope his former friend Captain Pike has for a normal life again - at least, normal in his mind."

Spock stiffened, his dark eyes widening in alarm, his eyebrows lifting in dread as he stared accusingly at the Talosian.

Smiling slight, the Keeper sensed that he had irrevocably won.

The Vulcan's resistance dissolved. He could not fight these beings of illusion any longer. It had been hopeless from the start. Already they had touched upon one of his deepest fears, reaching into his mind to find a weapon against him - the Captain's compassion. Kirk would agree to the Talosian's plan to help Captain Pike - and would risk the death penalty.

No. Whatever happened, that must not be risked - not even for Christopher Pike.

"Very well, Keeper. I will help you, knowingly, willingly, but every precaution must be taken to safeguard Captain Kirk."

"It will be done," the Talosian promised, and disappeared.

\* \* \*

Later that night in the rec room...

"Checkmate," the Captain grinned.

"Conceded. The game is yours, sir," Spock said, an eyebrow lifting in salute. "Your moves were illogical, as usual."

"Ah, but you're learning, my friend," Kirk said. "It was much more difficult to beat you this time. I'll teach you the value of unpredictability yet."

"If it is your intention to undermine my commitment to logic..."

"Now, Spock. Why would I do a terrible thing like that?" Kirk answered with mock innocence. "Besides, that's McCoy's life mission."

Spock seemed to withdraw a little from the easy, comradely mood of their evening.

Kirk, noticing, became more serious as he added, "A mission in which I trust he will not be too successful. I'm more than pleased with my logical, unemotional First Officer just as he is."

For a moment their eyes met. Then, with a shrug, the Captain rose to his feet, stretching luxuriously.

"Long game. Our audience deserted us," he said, looking about. He turned back to the Vulcan, smiling. "That's Humans for you. Not always as dependable and loyal as Vulcans. Well, goodnight, Mr. Spock. See you tomorrow on the Bridge."

"Goodnight, Captain."

\* \* \*

Alone in the rec room, Spock allowed a shiver to go through his lean form.

'Dependable.'

'Predictable.'

'Logical.'

All those preconceptions the Captain had of him would soon be shattered.

'I like you just as you are, my friend.'

The words, the very thought itself, radiated from the Human, enfolding him in a degree of acceptance and belonging that he had never known possible.

Kirk trusted him completely - a trust which was about to be betrayed.

Would their friendship - still delicate and growing - survive the deception he was about to participate in?

It was a risk he did not want to take, but it was outweighed by a greater risk which he would not take.

His Captain's trust - or Jim's life.

There was, after all, no choice.

No choice at all...

\* \* \* \* \*

Wee Jimmie Kirkie  
Runs through the ship  
In a gold Captain's shirt  
A phaser on his hip.  
Knocking on the bulkhead  
Whistling through the lock  
Are all the Klingons off my ship  
It's past eight o'clock.

#### SPOCK'S SECRET

Halfway down the passage  
Is the cabin where I sit,  
When I've a yeoman  
Who asks for it.  
What we are doing  
No-one can guess,  
But I can teach anyone  
To beat Jim at chess.

Barbara Wright

\* \* \* \* \*

"Logic rules." "Think logically!" "Logic teaches that..."  
 I have heard  
 The cool voice  
 Demanding  
 Logic;  
 For many years  
 The only answer was,  
 "Yes, Father."  
 But then one day I found  
 I want to go my own way.  
 Being the Ambassador's son is not enough.  
 "Logically you should be following  
 "Your father's advice."

My mother crying - my father as cold as ice -  
 But I would not yield.  
 All of Vulcan against me.  
 And I left  
 To attend Starfleet Academy.

Learning, fighting - to accept and be accepted  
 And as Vulcan as I could be.  
 The years went by  
 And my father would not accept, would not even speak to me...  
 (But read my letters he did.)  
 Mother, pleading with me.  
 "Return home - he loves you, needs you."  
 With the logic he had taught me  
 The reply was that if he did he'd tell me.  
 (But he could not, would not.)  
 And without looking back  
 I went on  
 To become an officer in Starfleet.

Years passed.  
 Pike had long left, and Jim and Bones became my friends.  
 Jim - with logic  
 Bringing Earth and Vulcan together  
 And making IDIC reality.

Journeys, travelling long distances among the stars,  
 And then - a journey to Rabel.  
 Sarek - as cold as ice,  
 Amanda by his side.  
 Rumours passing among crew and passengers alike.  
 Difficulties, dangers to be conquered.  
 A need unvoiced until it is - almost - too late.  
 Solving his problems  
 For him  
 Jim  
 Teaches me  
 To reach out -  
 And my parents are there.

"One does not thank logic!"  
 After eighteen years, my father, I'm finally able  
 To tell you  
 That you yourself are not  
 A very logical man, Sarek!